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**Australian Legends: historical explorations of Australian
masculinity and film 1970-1995**

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Galina Hanley
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Abstract

The twin purpose of this research is to explore films as historically specific cultural texts, rather than representations of one historical moment, and to engage with historiographical debates surrounding representations of masculinity in Australian history. I do this to create a way of engaging with film and history where film is culturally representative of the past, not simply a depiction of a specific point in time. This study considers two films, George Miller's *Mad Max* (1979) and Stephan Elliot's *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994) to explore the relationship over time between violence, masking and landscape with the representation of performative masculinity in an Australian context.

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Introduction

This study questions traditional historical figures and representations of masculinity in the Australian context and reflects on how these have been represented in film. It explores the idea of dominant images of masculinity and how they have been challenged or reinforced through two specific films, George Miller's *Mad Max* (1979) and Stephan Elliott's *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994).¹ Using an interdisciplinary approach combining cultural history and media studies, this study uses these films as cultural texts to observe the relationship between Judith Butler's concept of 'performativity' with a multifaceted Australian masculinity, to show how masculinity has been challenged over time through filmic representations.² It considers the historical context from which these images of masculinity emerged by using specific national histories, as outlined below.³ In doing so, this study also questions the way in which Australian historians have constantly reinterpreted the representation of masculinity as a hallmark of national identity. Crucially, the conceptual framework of performativity is useful here to deconstruct the styles of masculinity these historians explore, and to consider how the two films' performances of masculinity both reinforce and undermine these established images.

My approach is a distinct one, as no study has yet considered all these aspects of film analysis, masculinity and history together. By combining film studies and history from the perspectives of performance, culture, and historiography, I have

¹ George Miller *Mad Max* (Australia: Crossroads, 1979); Stephan Elliott *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Australia: Polygram, 1994).

² Judith Butler *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity* (New York, Routledge, 1999) xiv-xv.

³ Russell Ward *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978); Richard White *Inventing Australia* (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1981); David Day *Claiming a Continent* (Australia: Harper Collins, 2001); Frank Welsh *Great Southern Land* (Australia: Allen Lane, 2004).

constructed a framework for analysis using films as reflections of historical attitudes towards Australian masculinity. It is important to recognise that the concept of performativity utilised by this analysis is only one way of reading films as cultural texts, and, therefore, is influenced by my own subjectivity. However, I rely heavily on historians from the last fifty years to inform my research. My overall argument is that masculinity has been constructed in Australian history as the cornerstone of male identity, and it is performed as a way to prove one's worth and ability, to be strong and protective of a way of life. I prove this through a consideration of the historiographical debates in national history and how these are reflected or reinforced through the two Australian films used in this study. There has been a tradition of questioning the way history has been recorded, as Ann Curthoys outlines some of the issues in Australian historiography, stating:

The past is a hotly contested territory in Australia. Perhaps it is everywhere, though it seems especially unsurprising that a settler society whose processes of invasion and dispossession of indigenous peoples are relatively recent and in some respects still continuing has some particularly difficult issues to confront.⁴

This historiographical attitude is one of the main reasons behind my engagement with masculinity in Australian history. Curthoys identifies history much like the performance of masculinity, as something contested and fluid.

Four general Australian histories inform my argument. These are Russell Ward's *The Australian Legend* (1965), Richard White's *Inventing Australia* (1981), David Day's *Claiming a Continent* (2001) and Frank Welsh's *Great Southern Land* (2004).⁵ By focussing on these four histories, which span forty years, I can draw broad strokes about the changing attitudes of Australian historians. However, these histories have focussed on politics and nation building, and are mainly concerned with detailing the political events that made the nation what it is. One problem with the assertions made by historians in these histories include general assumptions about the mainstream ideas of masculinity within this

⁴ Ann Curthoys "Mythologies" in Richard Nile (ed) *The Australian Legend and its discontents* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2000) p. 11.

⁵ Ward *The Australian Legend*; White; Day; Welsh.

national identity; there has been little analysis of the attitudes of the general population as the focus has been to record national events. Nor are there many in-depth analyses as to whether the so-called 'political good' and 'prosperity' of the post-war period was really filtering down to the masses.⁶ By utilising these four histories, I investigate contemporary trends in history, dealing with a similar period to the case study films, and how they have influenced and been interpreted by recent historians. Richard Nile notes the Australian fixation on 'the Australian Legend', which has influenced and shaped nationalist interpretations of identity, and has passed into popular discourse as a series of self-evident qualities concerning national character'.⁷ The attention given by historians to the monolithic idea of 'national identities', incorporating such icons as the 'bushman', 'larrikin' or 'ocker', and other national icons, including the land and ties to it, have caused these ideas to become romanticised. In addition, the preoccupation with nation building made by many Australian historians means that many of these ideas have become mythologised in historical writing.

I draw on a number of approaches from history and media studies for my methodology to create my analytical framework. Cultural history provides the basis for this framework as it offers insight into the attitudes of Australians in this time period of 1970 to 1995 through the analysis of film as cultural texts.⁸ This was a period where the Australian film industry was undergoing a revival to combat the growing American film market.⁹ Cultural history alone does not inform how to read films for themes. Therefore, the interdisciplinary approach of combining cultural history and media studies enables for the analysis of films as cultural texts. I do this to account for the limitations in history and film theory outlined below, which have not yet considered film as a culturally representative. I justify this by arguing that films are symptomatic of the cultural contexts they are created in and provide varying representations of masculinity in a number of

⁶ Day p. 258.

⁷ Richard Nile "Introduction" in Richard Nile (ed) *The Australian Legend and its discontents* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2000) pp. 1-4.

⁸ For further exploration of cultural history, see Peter Burke's *What is Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

⁹ Barrett Hodson "Flagship Culture and Commercial Chimera Government Involvement in Australian Film" in Australian Films Institute *A Century of Australian Cinema* (Australia: William Heinemann, 1995) pp 156-163.

contexts supplied by the narrative, in both visual and aural channels. The proposition is that films reflect the cultural elements of their time. I also adapt approaches to feminist and gender history as a way to explore masculinity, yet neither of these fits fully with my framework. Recently, feminist histories began to allow for the exploration into masculinity, rather than focussing primarily on the role of women, yet this is still in its early stages. Green and Troup note the main focus of feminist historians has been women and writing them into the histories they were missing from or outlining the role of women in history.¹⁰ However, they also note the increasing role of masculinity in gender history:

[Ava] Baron argues that ‘gender is present even when women are not’, and that if we only investigate women, then “man” remains the universal subject against which women are defined in their particularity. [John] Tosh also remarks that encouraging a history of masculinity is a subversive act: ‘[m]aking men visible as gendered subjects has major implications of the historians established theme’.¹¹

Masculinity has been constructed as a large part of what it means to be Australian, with countless films devoted to the subject of proving what it means to be a man in an Australian context.¹² The historical foundations of this image reach back to the colonial need to assert a unique national identity in a harsh environment. These images continue through to the late twentieth century, and it is this period that is the focus for this study. Two authors stand out in an Australian specific context relating to masculinity. Robert Connell and Marilyn Lake deconstruct the foundations of Australian masculinity as representative of hegemonic national ideas surrounding what it means to be an Australian male.¹³

¹⁰ Anna Green and Kathleen Troup “Gender and History” in *The houses of history: A critical reader in twentieth-century history and theory* (UK: Manchester University Press, 1999) pp. 253-276.

¹¹ Green and Troup p. 259.

¹² Films such as: Fred Schepisi *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (Australia: The Film House / Victorian Film, 1978); Bruce Beresford *Breaker Morant* (Australia: 7 Network / Australian Film Commission / South Australian Film Corporation, 1980); Peter Weir *Gallipoli* (Australia: Australian Film Commission, 1981); Steve Jodrell *Shame* (Australia: Barron Entertainment, 1988); Geoffery Wright *Romper Stomper* (Australia: Australian Film Commission, 1992).

¹³ Robert Connell *Masculinities* (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1995); Robert Connell *The Men and the Boys* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2000); Marilyn Lake “Historical reconsiderations IV: The politics of respectability: Identifying the masculinist

Both come to the similar conclusion that masculinity relies on the domination of males over subordinate groupings such as women, children and homosexuals, yet both also observe that there are multiple styles of masculinity that act in relation to other social groupings. These styles depend on the level of interaction and friction between different social groups, from friendly to aggressive, and relate to the idea of masculinity as a performance, which I discuss below.

Lake explores the area of Australian masculinity in a nineteenth-century context, and this had not been covered in much detail at the time she published her work.¹⁴ Previous explanations of Australian men proved ‘neutral’ and ‘sex-less’, a universalised man representative of all rather than something dynamic and distinctive to the individual. In critiquing Russell Ward’s *The Australian Legend*, Lake shows that rural men were seen as cultural heroes, the embodiment of masculinity and national tradition, and this came as a reaction to an ‘urban malaise’, the dissatisfaction of city living, wherein ‘the bush’ was idolised as something better.¹⁵ Lake’s image of dominant Australian masculinity is a violent one, and to not live up to this representation was seen as a slight on Australian masculinity.¹⁶ However, Lake also argues that masculinity in this context was highly constructed and contested by historians. This viewpoint is backed up by Linzi Murrie, who draws on Lake’s ideas, stating:

In defence of men’s interest, the bushman masculinity was a powerful image. A man existing among men without broader social ties, the bushman’s freedom – his drinking, his gambling, his ‘independence’ and his sexual indulgence – could be celebrated in a spirit of nationalism as an ‘Australian’ freedom, thereby legitimising men’s social practises and masking the gender politics of the conflict.¹⁷

context” in *Australian Historical Studies*, Volume 22, Issue 86 (1986) pp. 116-131.

¹⁴ Lake pp. 116-131.

¹⁵ Ward *The Australian Legend*.

¹⁶ Lake pp. 116-131.

¹⁷ Linzi Murrie “The Australian Legend and Australian Men” in Richard Nile (ed) *The Australian Legend and its discontents* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2000) p 84.

Taking a sociological approach, Connell discusses the foundations of Australian gendered identity in his work *Masculinities* (1995), where he suggests that men proved themselves throughout history through displays of masculinity such as war and battle, and, where no other option was available, sporting events.¹⁸ He goes on to reason that the motivation to win is reinforced by social institutions to maintain a gendered hierarchical structure where expressions of masculinity were prized and seen as strength of character. Citing David Gilmore, Connell also argues that there was always a time that men would have to ‘prove themselves: “So long as there are battles to be fought, wars to be won, heights to be scaled, hard work to be done, some of us will have to ‘act like men’”’.¹⁹

It is this point in particular that links to Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity. According to Butler, as a way to prove themselves, men must cater to a performance of gender and show others who may judge them that they are worthy.²⁰ In his later work, *The Men and The Boys* (2000), Connell discusses the idea that masculinity is defined collectively in culture and sustained through the institutions that make up everyday life.²¹ According to this, violence was seen as an essential and natural tendency for masculine behaviour, supported by the ‘boys will be boys’ mentality that was used as a defence for male aggression:

There is a widespread belief that it is natural for men to be violent. Males are inherently more aggressive than women, the argument goes. ‘Boys will be boys’ and cannot be trained otherwise; rape and combat – however regrettable – are part of the unchanging order of nature. There is often an appeal to biology, with testosterone in particular, the so-called ‘male hormone’, as a catch-all explanation for men’s aggression.²²

Bettina Van Hoven and Kathrin Hörschelmann interpret Connell’s argument as that there is no such thing as a ‘universal’ masculinity, rather it is based on

¹⁸ Connell *Masculinities* (1995).

¹⁹ David Gilmore, cited in Connell *Masculinities* (1995) p. 33.

²⁰ Butler *Gender Trouble* 1999; David Gilmore, as cited in Marilyn Lake “Historical reconsiderations IV: The politics of respectability: Identifying the masculinist context” in *Australian Historical Studies*, 1940-5049, Volume 22, Issue 86, 1986 pp. 116-120.

²¹ Robert Connell *The Men and The Boys*.

²² Connell *The Men and The Boys* p. 215.

hierarchical range of styles that conform to hegemonic understandings.²³ Van Hoven and Hörschelmann go on to propose that these understandings receive their 'legitimation' through the 'marginalisation' of other forms of masculinity.²⁴ Masculinity is thus performed as a way to prove one's worth and strength in the protection of a way of life, what Connell terms, 'being a man'.²⁵ The fluidity of a masculinity that can adapt to any given social situation speaks to the idea that identity is performed rather than fixed for each individual. This is why the concept of performativity is employed as a way of exploring masculinity in an Australian historical context.

Performativity as a conceptual framework can be defined as a sort of improvisational act, where different identities can be adopted and explored at will. Butler states:

Performativity is thus not a singular "act", for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norm, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which there is a repetition.²⁶

Judith Butler also states that gender, sex and sexuality are not choices, therefore, the performance can only be adapted under constraints of predefined biology and ingrained social norms.²⁷ People perform their identity to meet the different social requirements of various groups in different social situations. This can be done through choice of clothing and voice, accentuating or suppressing specific attitudes, or acting in a manner the situation dictates as appropriate. A person will take on the attributes deemed socially acceptable by one group, but will change the style of performance to fit another. Butler's theory of performativity provides an interesting frame for analysis of an Australian masculine image in her assertion that gender is a performance with different contributing elements

²³ Bettina van Hoven and Kathrin Hörschelmann *Spaces of masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 2005) p. 8.

²⁴ van Hoven and Hörschelmann p. 8.

²⁵ van Hoven and Hörschelmann p. 8.

²⁶ Judith Butler *Bodies that Matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"* (NY: Routledge, 1993) pp. 12-13.

²⁷ Butler *Bodies that Matter* pp. 12-13.

that make the performance believable.²⁸ However, the individual is limited by what their culture dictates as acceptable behaviour through the repeated acts that are ingrained as 'normal' behaviour. It is through this repetition that acts become the core of gender, which Butler believes, cannot be changed.²⁹ Sara Salih uses the analogy of a wardrobe to describe performativity, where the gender, or the 'script', is predetermined and a person can assume a number of different costumes, voices and expressions to present a particular style to the audience.³⁰ Taking these attitudes into consideration, the framework for my analysis is based around the idea that masculinity is a performance tailored to the individual's or collective group's differing situations. The presentation of a different style of masculinity in varied social and cultural situations points to the need to conform to an acceptable image of what it means to be masculine in a particular context at a particular time. This also relates to the dynamics of power relations in the sense that one social group holds dominance, hence the need to perform masculinity more aggressively at times. The influences on this performance can range from the environment, both constructed internally in personal understanding of how to behave, and externally in the attitudes of different social and cultural groupings.

The approach for this study is to firstly consider the historical context in which ideas of masculinity were constructed and solidified, before applying them to filmic case studies. The four histories outlined earlier are used to explore the foundations of each chapter's theme. These are based on a sense of influence on performativity, something that informs and shapes it, and they also provide insight into the cultural attitudes of the time period in which they were written. Then, merging the ideas identified with the concept of performativity, I analyse the influences on masculinity presented in both films, combined with performativity, identifying how the historical themes and masculine identities are reinforced or challenged. I analyse the films' influence on the performance of masculinity each presents through character development, cultural and social situations, and the environment in which characters are placed.

²⁸ Butler *Bodies that Matter* p. 15.

²⁹ Butler *Bodies that Matter* p. iv.

³⁰ Sara Salih *The Judith Butler Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) p. 91.

This is a new approach to film and history, which in the past was focussed on period films and films depicting historical events. Film has become a legitimate avenue for historians as a way of making sense of the past. Robert Rosenstone, a key contributor to film and history literature, notes that after a century of motion pictures, film has become the chief carrier of historical messages in contemporary culture.³¹ He goes on to note that historical films are treated in two ways:

either as reflections of the political and social concerns of the era in which they were made, which means that the historical content is not taken seriously; or as books that have been put onto the screen.³²

This point is reiterated through Rosenstone's identification of three ways for historians to deal with film: as a text that provides a glimpse of the social and cultural concerns of a particular era; as an example of art or industry; or as a way to consider our relationship with the past.³³ Although he is speaking about historical motion pictures, the ideas are still relevant to using films as cultural texts. This opens up a new avenue for historians to explore the influence films have over cultures and the attitudes of social groupings. Peter Collins brings up a relevant point regarding the role of Hollywood in influencing history:

Hollywood has often attempted to influence history by turning out films consciously designed to challenge public attitudes towards matters of social or political importance...[sometimes] without intending to act the role of historian, Hollywood has often been an unwitting recorder of national moods.³⁴

This can translate well to Australian films as, during the period *Mad Max* and *Priscilla* were released, the nation was undergoing a revitalisation of its film industry to create films of an international standard in order to combat the

³¹ Robert A. Rosenstone *Revisioning History: film and the construction of a new past* (USA: Princeton University Press, 1995) p. 3.

³² Rosenstone *Revisioning History: film and the construction of a new past* p. 3.

³³ Rosenstone *Visions of the Past: the challenge to film to our idea of history* (USA: Harvard University Press, 1995) pp. 5-6.

³⁴ Peter C. Collins *Hollywood as a Historian: American Film in a Cultural Context (revised edition)* (USA: The University of Kentucky Press, 1983) p. 1.

growing Hollywood market.³⁵ Films are becoming a rich way to engage with history on a new level, as David Carter states:

Histories – ways of understanding the Australian past and its bearing on the present – are created for us and by us [as Australians] every day and circulate through the wide range of public and media spheres.³⁶

By drawing on the popular culture medium of film as a way to connect with the past, the traditional approaches of film and history can be adapted in order to create something new. By traditional approaches, I refer to the three key points about film and history identified by Marnie Hughes-Warrington in her book, *The History on Film Reader*.³⁷ The first two points are that ‘film is a distinct form of history’, and that previous film and history scholarship distinguishes film from written histories. The third point that applies more to this study; Hughes-Warrington argues that films relating to history are characterised by both their content and their expected effects on the viewer.³⁸ While Hughes-Warrington does not consider my approach specifically, she does propose that viewers share the film experience, actively participating in film and historical culture. This, in a way, ties into my idea that films present images of identity to be challenged or reinforced and by drawing on the celebrated images of national characters, films establish historically ingrained ideas more richly.

My focus is on late twentieth century trends of masculinity, hence the choice of recent films, which reflect similar ideas to the historiography I am exploring. I also chose the two films as they reflect very different images of Australian masculinity but have been widely presented as an acceptable way for men to behave. Both films hold historical significance in Australia as winners of Australian Film Institute Awards, and *Priscilla* also won numerous international awards including an Oscar and a British Academy of Film and Television Arts

³⁵ Tom O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* (NY/London: Routledge, 1996) p. 12.

³⁶ David Carter “Past and Future” in Richard Nile (ed) *The Australian Legend and its discontents* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2000) p 59.

³⁷ Marnie Hughes-Warrington *The History on Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2009) pp 2-6.

³⁸ Hughes-Warrington pp 2-5.

(BAFTA) Award.³⁹ Another reason for choosing these two particular films is that they fit into the period of research focus, and may be seen as an acceptable era of mainstream representations of Australian identity because the films have been so successful over time in terms of popularity and box office returns.⁴⁰ They are also well known Australian titles both nationally and internationally and can be seen as culturally representative of their time of production. I have avoided period films, such as Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* (1981), as they have already been studied as representations of historical periods and I want to move away from this type of engagement towards thinking of films as historical texts themselves⁴¹

In this thesis I explore three areas of influence on masculine performativity: violence; masking; and landscape, relating them firstly to the history, and then to the films. Each category provides insights into how masculinity has emerged in an Australian context and how it has been reinforced and challenged through the performance of masculinity in cultural texts such as these two films. Each chapter uses analytical themes to explore masculinity from one of three perspectives. The first chapter deals with *Mad Max* and the relationship between violence and the performance of masculinity. I use the themes of traditional images of Australian masculinity and 'way of life', collective masculinity, and the role of objects in the performance of masculinity.⁴² The second chapter deals with influence of masks in performing identity with regards to *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. This is explored from the perspective of the outsider, somewhat attempting to fit in to a foreign society. The chapter then moves on to consider how rural identity has been mythologised and explore the level of intolerance present that has not been shown in the romantic imagery of the outback. The third chapter compares both case study films and considers the

³⁹ Information comes from IMDb.com *The Internet Movie Database* 2010, <<http://www.imdb.com>> [accessed 3 January 2010].

⁴⁰ *Mad Max* has a lifetime domestic gross total of \$8,750,000, while *Priscilla* has grossed over \$11,000,000 domestically; IMDb.com *Box Office Mojo: Mad Max* 1990-2010 <<http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=madmax.htm>> [accessed 3 January 2010]; IMDb.com *Box Office Mojo: The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* 2010 <<http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=priscillaqueenofthedesert.htm>> [accessed 3 January 2010].

⁴¹ Peter Weir *Gallipoli* (Australia: Australian Film Commission, 1981)

⁴² 'way of life' is a term used by Richard White in his work *Inventing Australia*.

role of the Australian landscape as an influence on masculine performance, discussing the areas of the land itself as a construct of identity, and the landscape's role in the journey of an individual or collective into the unfamiliar.

The adaptability of masculinity in an Australian context has been heavily influenced by national histories, particularly in the area of violence, masking and environment, the subject of each chapter. I chose these themes after initially watching both films for depictions of masculinity. Considering the influences on performativity in relation to the films and the historical discussions surrounding the influences on Australian masculinity, confirming my hypothesis that masculinity is a performance tailored to meet the specific needs and expectations of different social groupings. This study also comments on the violent extremes to which this performance can go to in trying to prove acceptable masculine behaviour, and although it is the basis of my first chapter, it is also a recurring theme.

Overall, this thesis shows the way films can be engaged with as historically cultural texts, demonstrating the way historiographical debates can be utilised in conjunction with films to explain the past. Masculinity is the framework used to explore these ideas and explain why performativity is a useful concept when thinking about identity.

The Man or The Monster: Violence and Performative Masculinity in *Mad Max*

This chapter focuses on the relationship between violence and masculinity as a performance, and shows how this can be used to explore historiographical trends in Australia. Here, I examine various historical representations of Australian masculinity to highlight the influences on the concept of performativity. Throughout this chapter, I explore the work of Richard White, Russell Ward, Marilyn Lake, David Day and Frank Welsh to argue that the Australian historiographical themes of fear, family, and constructs of national identity reinforce and influence masculinity.⁴³ These histories are then used to investigate the Australian relationship with performative masculinity in George Miller's *Mad Max* (1979).⁴⁴ I explore three areas in this chapter in relation to historical ideas that influence Australian masculinity relating to fear: the threat to a particular 'way of life'; the collective pack mentality of a mob and multiple masculinities; and the way violence has been weaponised, that is, unconventional items are used as weapons to become more aggressive. I outline these themes using historical scholarship and historiographical debates before being applied to *Mad Max*. To conclude, I reflect on how these historical ideas are influences on the performance of masculinity, particularly as created in film, and how this type of analytical approach towards violence can provide a richer engagement with the past.

¹ Russell Ward *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978); Richard White *Inventing Australia* (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1981); Marilyn Lake "Historical reconsiderations IV: The politics of respectability: Identifying the masculinist context" in *Australian Historical Studies*, Volume 22, Issue 86, (1986) pp. 116-131; David Day *Claiming a Continent* (Australia: Harper Collins, 2001); Frank Welsh *Great Southern Land* (Australia: Allen Lane, 2004).

² George Miller *Mad Max* (Australia: Crossroads, 1979)

The first section, entitled ‘Celebrated Heroes’, investigates the role of fear, family, ‘mateship’ and an anti-authoritarian trend adopted by the cultural heroes of the past, those who became national identities such as the bushman and the ocker. Particular traits of loyalty, homosociality and the need for protection of a way of life have become ingrained in the national psyche. Masculine performativity can be read through the analysis of the protagonist’s relationships with other characters and his progressive development towards becoming a cold-blooded killer.⁴⁵ This progression raises the question of where the line of masculine behaviour is crossed from being harmless to sinister and may be seen as a comment on the extent of ruthlessness in aspects of Australian masculine performative behaviour. The second section, ‘Multiple Masculinities’, deals with the entrenched ‘boys will be boys’ mentality which is used as a way to justify male aggression and group brutality. I also explore the hierarchies within groups and how identity is tied to being part of a collective, and how when this is absent, individuals cannot function in the same way. This is achieved by investigating the different identities in the biker gang of *Mad Max*, who only seem able to function as part of a group with a rigid hierarchy. The third section, ‘Australian Styles of Violence and the use of Objects as Weapons’, considers the significance of weapons in an Australian context, and explores the use of cars, guns and less conventional but equally brutal items. The use of different vehicles holds significance in relation to Australian history, while the use of props such as guns and the hacksaw to assert masculinity over others in *Mad Max* speaks to the brutal nature of masculinity that has been fostered in earlier historical images of national identity, particularly in Ward’s *The Australian Legend*.⁴⁶

Finally, this chapter considers how the film challenges the stability of these relationships between violence and masculinity, considering whether they reinforce a dominant style, or warn against the potential danger of idolising an image that is not truly representative. By doing so, the chapter addresses the dominant concerns emerging from two decades of exploration into Australian historiography and relates similar dynamic understandings to masculinity.

⁴⁵ Miller *Mad Max*.

⁴⁶ Ward *The Australian Legend*.

Celebrated Heroes

The historical influences of fear on family and identity relate to the way violence is used in the performance of masculinity. The threat to what Richard White calls the 'Australian way of life' is what drives much of the performance of masculinity to exhibit control and power over social situations.⁴⁷ Those who exhibit this power often conform to the dominant image of a white masculine male and are seen to embody national traits of 'mateship' and anti-authoritarian attitudes. The most celebrated images in Australian history have been linked to the land and hard work, while traditional heroes like the 'bushman' and the 'larrikin' or 'ocker' have been the epitome of masculine identity in Australia shaping this through their attitudes towards women, violence and their homosocial or isolated nature. Many of these ideas are exhibited in *Mad Max*. It is the protagonist "Max's" fear of becoming a monster that drives the film, tapping into historical Australian notions of fear, protection and family. This film challenges many of the ideals that have been identified in cultural texts such as the poetry and prose of Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson, as well as histories such as Russell Ward, Manning Clark and Richard White.⁴⁸

Marilyn Lake's 1980s study of nineteenth-century masculinity highlights changing attitudes about manhood. Lake disagrees with the nineteenth-century image of masculinity centred around pastoral workers. This image has been explored in histories such as Ward's and White's, who reinforced the concepts of 'the bushman' and 'mateship' by projecting them as the type of masculinity to which Australians should conform.⁴⁹ These were histories where the image of national identity was always constructed as a white male, one who preferred either the company of other men or to be solitary. Lake makes this point citing Ward as the main cause for romanticising this rural image. According to Ward, it was cultivated in the poetry of Henry Lawson, whom Lake describes as

⁴⁷ White pp 158-159.

⁴⁸ Manning Clark *History of Australia* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962); Ward; White; Henry Lawson *Collected Verses* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1969); Banjo Paterson *A vision splendid: the complete poetry of A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson* (NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1990).

⁴⁹ Ward *The Australian Legend*; White.

‘unhappily married’, and who sought pleasure in a ‘careless, roaming lifestyle’ and privileged the nobility of ‘mateship’.⁵⁰ Also writing in the early 1980s, White discusses the ideas of George Johnston and W.E. H Stanner, and similarly finds this viewpoint problematic, stating that:

The idea that ‘the Australian way of life’ might in fact boil down to beer and gambling disturbed some writers. They wanted to define its true essence, but they simply repeated the vague rhetoric of Cold War politics.⁵¹

The attitudes of fear and the need to protect both a national way of life and family have been explored by writers such as David Day and Frank Welsh, as well as in general histories such as the *Oxford History of Australia* (1996).⁵² These writers do not explicitly link an Australian need to assert a dominant masculinity with the need to protect a way of life, yet the theme underpins most discussions.⁵³

The film challenges this image as the protagonist Max appears at his most open and emotional around his family, having uninhibited conversations with his wife Jesse about his past and what he wants from life, as well as playing a responsible and caring role towards their child, affectionately called ‘Sprog’. This highlights the shift in attitudes towards masculinity that has been presented by Lake.

However, some key themes still remained embedded in national ideas. In his book *Inventing Anzac* (2004) Graham Seal states that ‘mateship’ was the distinguishing characteristic of accepted images of Australian masculinity.⁵⁴ The

⁵⁰ Lake draws on Russell Ward’s *The Australian Legend* and Henry Lawson’s *The Vagabond*. p. 121.

⁵¹ White p. 161.

⁵² Geoffrey Bolton *The Oxford History of Australia Volume 5, 1942-1995: the middle way* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996); Day; Welsh.

⁵³ Margaret Beale Spencer, Suzanne Fegley, Vinay Harpalani & Gregory Seaton “Understanding Hypermasculinity in Context: A Theory-Driven Analysis of Urban Adolescent Males’ Coping Responses” in *Research in Human Development*, Volume 1, Issue 4 (2004).

⁵⁴ Graham Seal *Inventing Anzac: the digger and national mythology* (Australia: Queensland University Press, 2004) pp. 77-79.

term stems back to the ANZAC experience, where the culture of the diggers was tied up in the ‘assumption and assertion of masculinity’.

The diggers were, in their own naïve view and in reality, a mob of blokes going off to do a job of work. Their location was far from home, the chores dirty and dangerous, but someone had to roll up their sleeves and get on with the digging...Mateship was the unquestioning loyalty of a man for his ‘mate’ and is a familiar feature of the idealised bushman of the nineteenth century.⁵⁵

Bob Pease reiterates this idea discussing how, since the Gallipoli campaign, mateship has become a ‘part of Australian male heritage’ and ‘a significant part of Australian males self-image’.⁵⁶ Pease also argues that the most important element of mateship is centred on the premise that men prefer the company of other men rather than women.⁵⁷ Mateship has become so ingrained that it is reinforced by the nation’s government on a website entitled “Australia’s Culture Portal”, which has a page dedicated to the idea:

‘Mateship’ is a concept that can be traced back to early colonial times. The harsh environment in which convicts and new settlers found themselves meant that men and women closely relied on each other for all sorts of help. In Australia, a ‘mate’ is more than just a friend. It’s a term that implies a sense of shared experience, mutual respect and unconditional assistance.⁵⁸

Many of these elements are applicable to *Mad Max*, with Max and Goose’s ‘unquestioning loyalty’ to each other, and this ties into their respective performances of masculinity. Max’s interaction with Goose ties into traditional Australian ideals of how men should behave to prove themselves being strong and jovial with their mates while becoming violent with those who go against

⁵⁵ Seal p. 77.

⁵⁶ Bob Pease “Moving Beyond Mateship: Reconstructing Australian Men’s Practices” *A man's world?: changing men's practices in a globalized world* (NY: Zed Books, 2001) pp. 191-192.

⁵⁷ Pease pp. 191-192.

⁵⁸ Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts “Mateship, diggers and wartime” on *Australian Cultural Portal Website* (Australian Government, 2007) <<http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/mateship/>> [accessed 10 January 2010].

their beliefs.⁵⁹ Together, they embody all the traits of ‘mateship’: they are boisterous, and Goose tries his hardest to keep Max happy through witty banter and promises, indicating that Max, with his more serious attitude, is the dominant personality in their relationship. Both Max and Goose have a high sense of morality and turn to violence as a way to solve the problem when they feel anyone has been hard done by. This has not necessarily been constructed as an outright statement of their masculinity yet there is definitely an undertone of proving oneself through violent acts.

The anti-authoritarian trend is touched on in histories such as Russell Ward’s *The Australian Legend* and David Day’s *Claiming a Continent*, as well as other Australian films from this period such as *Gallipoli* (1981) and *Shame* (1988).⁶⁰ However, John Hirst states:

Australians think of themselves as anti-authority. It is not true. Australians are suspicious of persons in authority, but towards impersonal authority they are very obedient.⁶¹

I disagree with this viewpoint that the anti-authority trend is a myth and side with the argument made by John Docker that:

Australians are seen to be as anti-authority, anti-police, pro-prisoner, a tradition deriving from images of ill-treated convicts, sadistic convict overseers, and ‘Ned Kelly’, bushranger extraordinaire...this mythos can take many forms, and become bound in with other historical discourses, of tensions...between Australians and English as in the World War I Anzac legend and films like *Breaker Morant* and *Gallipoli*.⁶²

The evidence is present in historical icons and cultural heroes such as Ned Kelly who have been celebrated as anti-authority and enshrined through national films. In many films about Australians during the war, in these anti-authoritarian

⁵⁹ For general historical discussion in this area, see White; Day; Welsh.

⁶⁰ Ward *The Australian Legend*; Day; Weir *Gallipoli*; Steve Jodrell *Shame* (Australia: Barron Entertainment, 1988).

⁶¹ John Hirst *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History* (Australia: Black Inc Publishing, 2006) pp 306-307.

⁶² John Docker *Postmodernism and popular culture: a cultural history* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 263.

tendencies are explored through characters who are serious soldiers but also mates out for fun.⁶³

The 'larrikin' and 'ocker' characters in Australian literature embody this anti-authoritarian aspect and have become a celebrated style of performative masculinity in an Australian context. While the ocker originated as a 'satire of boorishness', it became an 'affectionate tribute' to the *Gallipoli* legacy.⁶⁴ The larrikin shows the more sinister aspects of Australian masculinity, as in Steve Jodrell's *Shame* (1989).⁶⁵ The larrikin has been described as a stereotypical Australian who is hard-drinking and tough talking, as well as being a hooligan and mischievous youth, who is characterised by disrespect and a disregard for decorum.⁶⁶ Each of these descriptions of male identity are held in high regard as constructs of Australian representations of masculinity.⁶⁷ Goose's reaction to crashing his bike during the initial chase scene shows how the ocker mentality in finding humour in some violent acts is acceptable. However, his emotional and aggressive reaction to the biker gang's attack on a young couple shows that humour is not extended to situations when people are really hurt. This proves how deep the trait of morality is ingrained into his masculine performativity, and complements Max's similar moralistic views. On the realisation that Max is beginning to enjoy the violence of his job, and seeing his badge as the only thing separating him from bad guys, Fifi suggests a holiday rather than resignation, signifying that he needs Max to be the enforcer and perform a particular role for the MFP, asserting masculine dominance through violent means.

The historical image of masculinity, identified as problematic by Lake, painted men as individualistic and self-centred, wanting to escape the pressures of family life. As the sole breadwinner in families, men's actions, whether conscious or unconscious, affected the whole family rather than the individual:

⁶³ War movies such as: Bruce Beresford *Breaker Morant* (Australia: 7 Network / Australian Film Commission / South Australian Film Corporation, 1980); Weir *Gallipoli*.

⁶⁴ White p. 170.

⁶⁵ Jodrell *Shame*.

⁶⁶ Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer eds. *A companion to Australian literature since 1900* (Australia: Camden House, 2007) pp. 167, 217, 220, 407.

⁶⁷ For discussion of these terms, see White; Welsh.

If men chose to spend a large portion of their earning on drinking, tobacco and gambling, the result well might be a deprived diet for their family and barefooted children. Drinking bouts could exacerbate domestic tensions and precipitate wife beating and child abuse.⁶⁸

The interaction with his wife shows Max at his least violent and aggressive in comparison to the way he deals with most other characters in the film. He is open and honest about how he feels and expresses his fear that he is turning into a monster. This is reinforced by the protagonist playing with a monster mask that he had used to playfully joke with his family moments earlier. Furthermore, contrary to the traditional view of Australian masculinity, outlined in many of the historical works already mentioned, is Max's openness with his wife and ability to discuss his emotions in a way as he remarks he could not with his father:

When I was a kid, me and my father used to go for long walks. I remember staring down at his shoes. They were special shoes, brown, and always kept them really shiny. He was tall and he used to take long strides. And there I'd be right alongside him, just trying to keep up with him. I don't think he ever knew how proud I felt of him or how good it felt just to be there alongside him. Even now when I think back on it, I still feel... The thing is, Jess, I couldn't tell him about it then, but I can tell you about it now. I don't want to wait 10 years to tell you how I feel about you right now.⁶⁹

This indicates a more recent change in attitudes about how masculinity was performed, supporting the legacy of the feminist movement and writers such as Lake. This openness is a side of him that only Max's wife is witness to, and this is significant as she has the main female role in the film. This highlights the diversity of Max's masculine image in comparison with his workmates, the bikers and incidental characters he meets throughout the film.

Historical notions of fear and protection were accentuated in attitudes around wartime, where men enlisted to protect their family and 'way of life'.⁷⁰ Richard

⁶⁸ Lake, pp. 122-123.

⁶⁹ Miller *Mad Max* time code: 00:51:53 - 00:52:58.

⁷⁰ White pp. 158-162.

White describes his concept of an Australian 'way of life' as coming from a 1940s change in the basis of Australian identity:

The idea of a 'way of life' fulfilled both general Western needs and more specific Australian ones...[it also] represented a broad shift in Western thought which was closely related to a new Cold War outlook. In that Cold War context, Australia was becoming an important bulwark of 'freedom'.⁷¹

Similar to his sense of morality for the victims of the biker gang's attack, Max has an intense reaction and feels the need to serve justice. Yet when his family is involved, the performance of Max's masculinity is exaggerated to become more violent in an attempt to protect his family and later to seek vengeance for their deaths. It is only after the death of his family that Max becomes the violent monster he is afraid of, performing a style of masculinity to such an extent with the same calculating coldness exhibited in his initial pursuit of the Nightrider, yet without the sense of morality that previously restrained him. Once the softness his relationship that Jesse gave him is removed, a dimension of his masculinity is lost creating the monster that becomes Max's main performance made rather than one of many he changes his attitudes and actions to fit his different needs.

This contrasts to ideas of 'hypermasculinity' a term, coined by Ashis Nandy, that first came into use in the early 1980s to replace the concept of 'machismo'.⁷² It has been more recently explored by Thomas Scheff and is based around competition and linked to violence.⁷³ Citing the ideas of Erving Goffman, Scheff notes:

The hypermasculine pattern promotes competition, rather than connection between individuals. It is not just asocial, but anti-social. This is one of the ideas crucial to the understanding of

⁷¹ White p 158-159.

⁷² Ashis Nandy *The Intimate Enemy: The Psychology of Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford, 1988).

⁷³ Thomas Scheff *Hypermasculinity and Violence as a Social System* (USA: University of California, Santa Barbara, 2007) accessed via <http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/scheff/main.php?id=51.html>. [accessed 27 October 2009].

unnecessary conflict: the cult of masculinity promotes individuality at the cost of community.⁷⁴

Connell has a similar concept of 'hegemonic masculinity', where women are subordinated by men who are driven by aggression and self-reliance to fulfil a purpose. In *Masculinities* Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as the 'currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy', that is, a society where men are dominant and in control and women are subordinated through expressions of masculine strength.⁷⁵ Though hegemonic masculinity is a slightly different term, it has the same link to violence and expressions of aggression that hypermasculinity does.⁷⁶ Both rely on the subordination of others to fulfil an individual need to demonstrate strength and power, and also prove dominance through aggression.

Max's interaction with Johnny the Boy builds as the film progresses to finally the truly violent act of forcing Johnny the Boy to either cut through his foot or be blown up. This is the same fate that Goose suffered at the somewhat reluctant hands of Johnny the Boy and shows the extent to which Max's masculinity has reached a hypermasculine level, creating a new facet to Max's character. This performance emerges from Max's pain at losing his family and friend, becoming the monster he always feared.

Multiple Masculinities

Identity, during this period of post-war Australia, had become a very singular and dominant representation, not addressing the need for fluidity. Connell argues that masculinity can be defined collectively in cultures, and is sustained by institutions and hierarchical structures, where multiple versions of one's masculinity compared with others are constructed and defined by their relationships.⁷⁷ During this period of Australian history, violence was often used to prove masculinity, and was seen as a natural tendency for men who were

⁷⁴ Scheff.

⁷⁵ Robert Connell *Masculinities* (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1995) p. 77.

⁷⁶ Connell *Masculinities* (1995) p. 77-78.

⁷⁷ Connell *The Men and the Boys* p. 11.

essentially more aggressive than women under the 'boys will be boys' mentality. Connell notes that in most cases, testosterone was seen as the key defence for male aggression.⁷⁸ This is most exemplified in *Mad Max* by the biker gang who have a hierarchical structure and display both collective and individual styles of masculinity. While the bikers share similar elements to the 'bushman' and other rural icons, they are more animalistic and embody less romanticised characteristics of masculinity. The biker gang's action ties into the sinister nature of mob masculinity. Cited in Erika Gottlieb, Béla Hamvas defines this mentality:

The rule of the mob means that the individual, clear, intelligent and sober activities are taken over by the mob's confused, blind, hazy and non-conscious activities, and in the process the human experience becomes blurred and sinks under.⁷⁹

This means that the individual gives up their own clear thinking in favour of following the mob's actions. In order to prove themselves to the larger group, the gang members of *Mad Max* must exhibit extreme cases of collective violence over others seen as weak or getting in the way of their fun. The danger that the biker gang pose to Max and his family, as well as to the general population, also speaks to historical trends of fear of violence and the threatening of a 'way of life'.⁸⁰

Connell states that "[m]asculinities are sustained and enacted not only by individuals, but also by groups, institutions, and cultural forms like mass media" and that these support and define violence as a collective notion rather than strictly an individual one.⁸¹ The collective style of masculine performativity in the biker gang somewhat breaks down as they are unable to protect each other as part of the whole, and their subsequent violent actions in retaliation to the Nightrider's death show they need to re-establish their performativity as dominant, therefore, proving their masculinity once more as acceptable in their particular social situation.

⁷⁸ Connell *The Men and the Boys* p. 215.

⁷⁹ Béla Hamvas cited in Erika Gottlieb *Dystopian fiction east and west: universe of terror and trial* (Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001) p. 158.

⁸⁰ White; Day; Welsh.

⁸¹ Robert Connell *The Men and the Boys* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2000) p. 217

Connell argues that power through violence is the most obvious assertion of masculinity, and that this along with the division of labour among the hierarchical structures of social groupings shows the dominance of masculine identities, highlighting their performative style as one that inspires dominance over others.⁸² Physical force is used to define and maintain these hierarchies, as well as exclude those who do not conform. Those who are most powerful usually have few incentives to change their lifestyle or attitude.⁸³ Anthony Giddens uses Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity to explain gender hierarchies, which are centred on one defining premise: that men are dominant over women. Hegemonic masculinity is at the top of the hierarchy.⁸⁴ Those who are dominant use physical force to stay on top, yet while those lower in the hierarchy act out this violence while those at the top control it.

In *Mad Max*, the leader of the biker gang, Toecutter, is initially depicted as the instigator of violence, rather than a participant. The film shows him observing as the lower-level gang members do their best to impress and violently prove themselves to him instead using violence himself. This performativity works well for the gang leader as he convinces others to commit violence in his name, giving him a reputation as a ruthless and brutal antagonist who must be feared. Another violent aspect of Toecutter's performance relates to his voice, primarily soft and snide, which comes off as venomous as he convinces others to do his dirty work while he laughs about it. This is an element which adapts to the particular kind of violence he is wishing to be enacted, and he can become almost as maniacal as the Nightrider although seemingly more in control. Although second-in-charge of the biker gang, Bubba Zanetti presents an interesting mix of being effeminate through his hair, costuming and voice, yet still dominant over the lower gang members. His bleached hair and well kept image contrasts with the animal like appearance of many of the biker gang, Bubba Zanetti's image surprises the viewer to watch as Bubba Zanetti turns to push Toecutter to become more aggressive as the gang leader initiates Johnny the Boy. Bubba Zanetti's style of

⁸² Connell *The Men and the Boys* p. 216

⁸³ Connell *The Men and the Boys* pp. 216-217

⁸⁴ Anthony Giddens *Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006) pp 463-465.

masculinity differs from the rest of the biker gang, who assert themselves through violent means. He emerges as calculating and cold, showing the extent of his performative masculinity is far more similar to Max is in contrast to the other bikers.

Ross Haenfler, citing the previous work of Connell, argues that there is a general set of expectations attached to sex in any cultural context and that that this expectation provides the pressure on young men to prove their masculinity.⁸⁵ This is done through exhibitions of toughness, sexual conquest, and excessive drinking. Haenfler notes that the ‘traditional proving grounds’ of masculinity were work and the frontier, but as these have disappeared as a uniquely male role, there has been a crisis of masculinity as young men do not know how to prove themselves anymore.⁸⁶ Without this ability to prove themselves through physical means or through expressions of control or power, young men feel incapable of proving their masculinity.

As Toecutter’s potential protégé, Johnny the Boy has the most to gain from performing to a certain image of masculinity. However, the various encounters he has with violence show that in trying to prove himself worthy to Toecutter, Johnny the Boy is unable to mentally process the acts he is forced to partake in, relying on alcohol to escape. Even during the closing scenes of the film where Max gives Johnny the Boy the opportunity to face up to his actions, Johnny the Boy simply babbles drunkenly, unable to process the violent acts he has been party to. This shows that he also cannot live up to the image of masculinity that he has crafted for himself as a biker gang member and that his style of performativity is fundamentally flawed, becoming weak under pressure.

Ward devotes a chapter to the bushman exploring how the figure came to be a symbol of Australian identity, stating that this image began to take shape before the Gold Rush of the 1850s and had been enshrined in the work of Joseph

⁸⁵ Ross Haenfler *Straight edge: clean-living youth, hardcore punk, and social change* (NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006) p. 105.

⁸⁶ Haenfler p. 105.

Furphy, Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson.⁸⁷ He argues that the bushman held a ‘manly independence’ and embodied the spirit of mateship, whilst being a rough ‘wanderer’ a ‘profane swearer’ and ‘profoundly reserved in his attitude to policemen’.⁸⁸ The latter period of the nineteenth century provided a great strengthening of nationalist feelings at the price of racist sentiments as native-born Australians began to make up the majority of the population and bushmen felt themselves to be ‘true Australians’.⁸⁹ However, John Rickard draws the larrikin in a similar image, considering the negative aspects of performance in this identity, arguing:

the offensiveness of larrikins lay in the public nature of their performance: they occupied the footpaths, jostling and heckling respectable passers-by; their language was foul and they spat tobacco; they drank heavily and sometimes broke up hotel bars; they had no respect of police, and, when in sufficient numbers, harassed and assaulted them.⁹⁰

The Nightrider’s animalistic image contrasts with the celebrated representation of the bushman as both are shown to be unkempt and uncivilised, but conforms more to Rickard’s ideas of larrikinism. It is clear through the act of stealing an MFP patrol car that the Nightrider is trying to prove himself, and this is particularly evident through his manic ravings. These ravings plead for him to be recognised as a person and for his actions. For example, his cry “can you see me Toecutter?”⁹¹ evokes a need to be acknowledged, implying this is a performance to prove himself to the leader of the biker gang. This is a performance of masculinity that is linked to the collective identity of the biker gang expressed in devotion to the leader.

The biker gang as a collective group, present a mob-like style of performativity. However, each member also plays an individual role within the collective. While each member is aware of his position, he is not allowed to become complacent,

⁸⁷ Ward *A nation or a continent* pp 216-249.

⁸⁸ Ward *A nation or a continent* pp. 216-218.

⁸⁹ Ward *A nation or a continent* pp. 236, 246.

⁹⁰ John Rickard “Lovable Larrikins and Awful Ockers” in Richard Nile (ed) *The Australian Legend and its discontents* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2000) p 298.

⁹¹ Miller *Mad Max*.

and must constantly prove himself worthy of being a part of the group. Without each member performing his role, the collective ceases to function adequately: the leader cannot lead without followers, the young man cannot prove himself without personal drive, and the enforcer must back down when he is faced with a greater monster than himself. None of the bikers can live up to their performative style without having another gang member present to perform to.

Australian Styles of Violence and the use of Objects as Weapons

Various objects can be employed as an enhancement of masculinity and violence, predominantly cars, guns and other inherently violent objects. The car holds particular significance in Australian performative styles going back to the 1950s and the introduction of the first Holden, which became a sign of affluence and respectability.⁹² This makes the Holden significant as the main object used as a weapon in *Mad Max*. Guns are also tied to masculinity as a symbol of security, and the male need to protect a way of life. This can be seen in the historical accounts of soldiers and other men who felt a weapon was needed to feel safe. However, guns can also be used in a destructive way that sometimes challenges masculinity, and as both a protective and vengeful element.

Cars show a distinct 'way of life' that car advertisers capitalised on to create an Australian image tied to machines. There has been a common 'Ford versus Holden debate' present in Australia, where the culture favours loud and noisy cars that articulate a discourse about gender, class and rites of passage.⁹³ The Holden Kingswood was marketed to 'exploit the phenomenon of automania', culturally creating the car as an accessory of 'ocker maledom'.⁹⁴ Manning Clark notes that the car market provided a measure of the nation's growing power over its own actions as British imported cars quickly declined in favour of Japanese

⁹² Ward *A nation for a continent* p. 330.

⁹³ David Callahan *Contemporary issues in Australian Literature* (NY: Routledge, 2002) p. 98.

⁹⁴ Richard Strauss *Up for rego: a social history of the Holden Kingswood* (Australia: Pluto Press, 1998) p. 37

imports.⁹⁵ However, during the period this film was released, as Australia was experiencing an influx of Japanese made cars, so the use of Holdens in this film, as an Australian-made car, may have been used to counter or comment on the Asian influence on a national landscape.⁹⁶

Max's ability to drive without fault as he hunts down the Nightrider contrasts with the incompetence of the other MFP officers who crash during the chase and proves his dominant masculinity over those he works with. It suggests skill, confidence and control over his actions, making his performance seem strong and dominant. The car is driven with the same deliberate purpose that Max shows in his initial performance where he also hunts down the Nightrider. The panel van that Max drives with his family mimics the softer performance of his role that is seen in the interaction between Max and his family. Yet masculine dominance is shown through Max driving the panel van for the better part of their holiday and is tested on the occasions his wife Jesse drives as she becomes the target of the biker gang. Max's performativity is enhanced by the 'muscle car', which is offered up to Max as an enticement to keep him working for the MFP. It acts as a further extension of his masculinity in its menacing look and sound as Max uses it to hunt down the biker gang members he holds accountable for the deaths of his family and friend. The change in car reflects Max's change in attitude from the initial pursuit man of the MFP to the monster he was so scared of becoming yet seems to embrace as he stalks after the biker gang in his black monster machine. The car becomes a weapon for Max's retribution, as he becomes the monster, the car mimics him with its roaring engine and intimidating look, much like Max's leather-clad image and cold demeanour.

The motorcycles are a more stealth-like and sinister mode of transportation with which the gang can inflict their own brand of aggravated violence. In contrast to Goose's motorcycle used at the beginning of the film, the biker gang ride much more brutish looking motorcycles. Goose makes use of an MFP cruiser which is sleek and shiny compared with the dirty motorcycles the biker gang. The way the biker gang ride their motorcycles without respect for road laws is much more

⁹⁵ Clark *A Short History of Australia* pp. 301-302.

⁹⁶ White; Clark.

chaotic and weapon-like compared with Goose, who slides off his bike in a controlled crash so no one is hurt before jokingly asking what is happening. The haphazard way in which the biker gang use their motorcycles as weapons in mob-like scenarios gives them a more menacing image and enhances their collective masculine identity as a force not to be messed with. When the biker gang target Goose for attacking Johnny the Boy after his acquittal, they sabotage his bike, causing him to be thrown off at high speed. They then ambush him, causing his car to run off the road to pin him captive inside. This moment presents Johnny the Boy the opportunity to prove himself and become initiated into the gang when Toecutter forces him to commit a violent act. Again, the vehicle is used as a weapon by Toecutter and Johnny the Boy as the gang leader instructs his new inductee to set the broken fuel line on fire to blow up the car with Goose still inside. Though the violent act is executed in an indirect way, possibly showing Johnny the Boy's reluctance and inability to murder coldly.

This aligns with Connell's idea that masculinity is defined by culture and is sustained through institutions in the sense that the biker gang are an institution in their own right and have their own cultural understandings.⁹⁷ The idea of peer justification plays into Connell's concept that masculinity is sustained through institutions by creating a tradition of conforming to cultural standards as a means of being accepted in a society.⁹⁸ Being fully aware of the cultural expectations placed on him through membership of this institution, Johnny the Boy knows it is his duty, to the biker gang, to commit the violent acts Toecutter of requires him. However reluctant he is, it is the style of masculinity he is attempting to live up to, which is reinforced by the hierarchical structure of the gang. This informs how Johnny the Boy is expected to act given the institutionalised structures of everyday biker gang life. It also acts as an assertion of his masculine dominance through violence that has been 'peer justified'.

In a revised edition of *Masculinities* (2005) written a decade after the first, Robert Connell notes the feeling of being emasculated by those in power at the thought of guns being taken away, 'on both symbolic and practical levels, the

⁹⁷ Connell *The Men and the Boys* p. 131.

⁹⁸ Connell *Masculinities* (1995) p. 83, 99

defence of gun ownership is a defence of hegemonic masculinity'.⁹⁹ This is also a trend identified by Catriona Elder who states that:

For many Australian men, for whom gun ownership was a rite of passage and a taken-for-granted part of their lives, to be recast as dangerous...[and] to be understood as illegal was alienating.¹⁰⁰

While these are very recent viewpoints, they may have stemmed from the use of guns and violence as an expression of masculinity during the period *Mad Max* was released. Elder hints at this as she mentions that many Australian men were shaped by stories 'centralising independence and self-reliance' but were just as shaped by violence.¹⁰¹ As these two writers have outlined, guns have featured heavily in the construction of an Australian identity. Unlike the soldiers, outlined in much Australian literature, the gun is not used as a prop for collective defence nor for protection by the rural identity of the bushman who is presented as a solitary figure.¹⁰² This speaks to the isolated nature of the contemporary Australian rural identities that have been explored in *Mad Max*.

Guns do not feature heavily as weapons in comparison to the vehicles in the film, they are used in a somewhat defensive mode against the biker gang during the final confrontation that begins on the farm. The farm's aging owner, "May Swaisey" pulls a gun on the biker gang and forces them into a storage room in an attempt to give Jesse enough time to escape, yet the bikers do not go after May, instead focussing on Jesse as the sole source of their aggravation. The other use of a gun in relation to masculine performativity is in Max's chasing down of Bubba Zanetti and shooting him point blank with a shotgun as retribution for his family's murder. The gun is used to show how ruthless Max has become and how his performance has changed without Jesse present to soften his masculinity. The fact that Max is also wounded by the gun, but straps himself up well enough to still function, shows his need to fulfil his vengeful actions and

⁹⁹ Robert Connell *Masculinities* 2nd Edition (USA: University of California Press, 2005) p. 212.

¹⁰⁰ Catriona Elder *Being Australian: Narratives of National Identity* (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2007) p. 75

¹⁰¹ Elder *Being Australian: Narratives of National Identity* p. 75.

¹⁰² Ward; Connell; Day.

adhere to his new performative style. This could also be representative of wounded pride at his inability to protect his family and also proves how dedicated he has become to his cause of eliminating those who have wronged him.

This is reiterated by Max's final act in taking down Johnny the Boy, where he handcuffs him to a crashed vehicle, which Max has set up to explode in a short amount of time. Johnny the Boy is given a hacksaw with the option to cut through either the handcuffs or his foot in order to save himself before the vehicle blows up. The choice of hacksaw indicates just how ruthless Max has become due to the pain of losing his family and how far he is willing to go for vengeance. This illustrates Max's change to the monster that he was once fearful of becoming, yet embraces in triumphing over the biker gang who caused him so much pain. Max also appears to have become numb by this point and void of the emotions that softened him around his family, but also provided the sense of morality that he held so close when working for the MFP. This is something Max had definitely lost while pursuing the biker gang for retribution. This causes a change in his style of performativity through the loss of the dimension of being able to recognise how emotions, honesty and openness are not necessarily unrelated to masculinity. It is unclear whether Max has completely lost this aspect of his masculinity and whether it has become a lost part of his performance, or if the potential may still be possible if Max can ever move past the death of his family and friends, as well as reconcile himself with the violent acts he has subjected his adversaries to.

Conclusions

Although the issue of fear has been discussed throughout Australian history as a key facet in national identity, it has also provided a strong influence on the performance of masculinity. While the idea of violence being tied to masculinity is constantly implied, it is often thought to link with either ideas of protection or the hypermasculine assertions of dominance. Masculinity has not directly been linked to performativity, yet the underlying ideas of a performance are constant

as is evident by the treatment of violence as an influence on masculinity in *Mad Max* and the protagonist's changing attitudes towards various characters. While the film is fundamentally violent to begin with, both Max and the biker gang use violence to confirm their masculinity to everyone they encounter. Both groups also use violence to protect their way of life from those who wish to challenge it. This is also a reinforcement of masculine performativity being tied to structures of daily habit, shown when characters are taken out of their comfort zone of normal rituals. When this habit breaks down, it leads to the destruction of parts of their world through the violent acts that are the climax of each disturbing encounter as well as testing the performative masculinity of each character. Max appears to be the only one to pass this test as he completes his revenge, proving himself as the most dominant character of the film. Though whether he still has the potential for alternative styles of his own masculine performativity is dependent on the realisation of whether he can live with the violence he has been through or whether he will lose control completely. While gaining control of all others in the film, Max loses control of himself and in turn becomes the monster he always feared. The negative influence of Max's transformation into a monster speaks to the relationship between violence and historical attitudes towards masculinity, where aggression and dominance were seen as signs of strength. However, historiographical debates about gender and mateship have countered this argument in choosing to question the role of violence and masculinity throughout Australian history.¹⁰³

This chapter has considered the relationship between violence and the performance of masculinity in this *Mad Max*. It has explained much about the construction of the characters' masculine identities. Fear drives the film, but it is the emotional connection the viewer has with the screen that creates a new way of engaging with the past. The filmic depictions of national character type can be read as reinforcing, reconstructing and challenging the idea that identity is static and does not change. Through constructing a new approach to film and history, using visual, aural and emotional channels to engage with the past on a richer level, the influence of violence on the performance of masculinity can be

¹⁰³ Lake pp 116-302.

explored on a deeper level. This also proposes new ways of thinking about films as a part of history as well as a representation of a historical moment when violence was considered a highly influential aspect of what it meant to be Australian.

In the following chapter I draw on similar analytical tools to link historiographical debates with ideas of the masking of masculinity and the reason for one to assume a mask as an element of their individual masculine performativity.

“A cock on a rock in a frock”:
The Masking of Performativity in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*

This chapter explores the connection between masking and masculinity that has been rooted in historical records, but has also been challenged by recent works and contemporary films. The overall theme of this chapter is to explore the link between the reasons for assuming a mask and the relationship between masking and masculine performativity. The approach to exploring these ideas rests on three themes: a fear of outsiders; a journey to the mythologised outback; and the harsh reality of this journey, which highlight the need to use a mask for masculine performativity. These issues present an often negative commentary on the intolerance of many Australian men towards those who are different. This chapter will explore the historical contexts of the performance of masculinity as represented in Stephan Elliott’s *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994).¹⁰⁴ I use the different aspects of masking as key areas for understanding the performative style of *Priscilla*’s characters in relation to the national traditions embodied in history. This chapter also considers how each of these elements is dynamically structured and tailored to a specific social grouping within the film, and how *Priscilla* also reflects common cultural attitudes towards outsiders during the period this film was produced. There is a noticeable change in attitude towards the representation of masculinity in *Priscilla* compared with *Mad Max* (1979), where the violent aspects of masculine performativity are shown negatively in the background rather than the main focus. This is a reflection of 1990s tenor of the film and its cultural preoccupations.

¹⁰⁴ Stephan Elliott *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Australia: Polygram, 1994).

This chapter uses *Priscilla* to focus on three analytical themes to explore the relationship between masking and the performative masculinity. The film's concentration is on the actions of outsiders rather than 'traditional' Australian characters, such as the bushman, the larrikin and the ocker explored in the previous chapter. It also explores less conventional notions of identity in the drag queens of *Priscilla*, who are aware of their status as outsiders and embrace it openly throughout most of the film, suggesting a challenge to the established historical scholarship of Ward and White by questioning mainstream cultural and social structures. The second area of study examined is the myth of the outback by exploring how this is a journey not reserved for a particular type of masculine identity. Relating the drag queens' altercations with the people of small town Australia to the romanticised view of rural living, shows the gritty truth of a rough life rather than the unrealistic fabrication that is identified with and often celebrated in the majority of historical texts. Third, this chapter explores the overall intolerance of rural living, as opposed to urban living where most of the population was located, and also how ignorance separates and creates friction between people and that fear of the unknown fosters this trend. 'Masking' as a conceptual tool deals with the ways in which the performance of masculinity is adapted to any given context through the use of costume, voice and other physical expressions to provide a protective barrier to the unknown. Again, film provides a rich text for examining the social and cultural attitudes of the time they were created, and can highlight the motivations for the influence of masking in the performance of masculinity from the various perspectives offered in *Priscilla*.

Outsiders to the Australian 'way of life'

The concept of assimilation, which was seen as a way to protect 'the Australian way of life' and encourage immigrants to conform as a way of fitting in during the 1950s, left some Australians with an inbuilt national fear of outsiders.¹⁰⁵

While in the 1950s assimilation was required of all outsiders, immigrants and

¹⁰⁵ David Day *Claiming a Continent* (Australia: Harper Collins, 2001) pp. 298-304.

aborigines alike, and *Priscilla* explores the lives of outsiders in relation to traditional Australian identities of white, heterosexual men. The main characters that the film focuses on are the three drag queens, Anthony 'Tick' Belrose (a.k.a Mitzi Del Bra), Adam Whitely (a.k.a Felicia Jollygoodfellow) and Bernadette Bassanger (formerly 'Ralph' and often called 'Bernice' by Adam) and their interaction with rural Australia.¹⁰⁶ The drag queens identify more with other outsiders, with many of the confrontations and conflicts occurring with mainstream rural Australians. Only when other characters make as much effort to befriend the drag queens can they understand the significance of the masks used by the performers as protective. The costuming and attitudes of the drag queens creates an obvious barrier of cultural difference, distinct to traditional Australian masculinity, but are also used as a defence mechanism to keep themselves confident in their identity. Once the protagonists are more comfortable with their masculinity in the unfamiliar environment, they begin to become less caricatured versions of themselves and develop less exaggerated styles of performativity, showing them as more able to understand the cultural and social situations in which they are placed.

Richard White proposes that in the 1920s, non-British migration was seen as an 'external threat' to the Australian 'way of life', hence the need for the ongoing rhetoric of the White Australia policy. White argues that assimilation was required of aborigines and migrants to assume a "common, homogenous way of life which would be threatened unless outsiders conformed to it."¹⁰⁷ In reaction to this, most immigrants abandoned their cultural heritage in favour of the Australian way of life, particularly due to the politics of immigration asserting the need for one single culture.¹⁰⁸ The novel and subsequent film version of Nino Culotta's *They're a Weird Mob* (1958; 1966) gave the impression that holding onto one's heritage and culture was bad and would not make migrants

¹⁰⁶ Elliott *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.

¹⁰⁷ Richard White *Inventing Australia* (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1981) p. 160.

¹⁰⁸ Geoffrey Bolton *The Oxford History of Australia Volume 5, 1942-1995: the middle way* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996) p. 106

‘Australian’, but that assimilation would.¹⁰⁹ Though it was never legally defined, the policy provided a general prejudice towards outsiders, denying any possibility for the influence other cultures could have on a new way of life.¹¹⁰ Catriona Elder states that the ‘official logic’ of the national government was that, although migrants would start their new lives with a lower standard of living, through assimilation their world would be opened up to better opportunities. However, Elder also notes that the cost of assimilation was a loss of identity for many migrants as difficulties with language and heightened feelings of displacement took over and their culture was lost.¹¹¹ The relaxation of a ‘token Asian presence’ in the 1960s came out of an understanding and confidence that immigrants would shun their ethnic heritage in favour of an ‘Australian way of life’. The result of this, Day argues, was that national identity could no longer centre on being ‘white’ due to the increasing cultural diversity in the population.¹¹² However, this did not translate to cultural attitudes towards outsiders, who were still expected to assimilate to an Australian way of life and an adherence to the core ‘traditional values’. Day identifies these values as ‘mateship’, ‘social equality’ and ‘a fair go’, yet it is hard to see many of these values being reflected outside of assimilated versions of national identity, or toward anyone of a different cultural background who could be considered an outsider.¹¹³

These three core values of assimilation, identified by Day, can be read as constructs for the performative masculinity of the characters in *Priscilla*.¹¹⁴ On some levels, the drag queens attempt to assimilate into outback society by complying with the traditional pastimes of drinking and socialising with the locals. Yet, they often reject them at the same time by choosing to deny many of

¹⁰⁹ Nino Culotta *They're a Weird Mob* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1958) [novel]; Michael Powell *They're a Weird Mob* (Australia: Williamson/Powell, 1966) [film]

¹¹⁰ White pp. 159-160.

¹¹¹ Catriona Elder “Immigration history” in Martyn Lyons & Penny Russell (eds) *Australia's history: themes and debates* (Australia: University NSW Press: 2005) pp. 99-112 .

¹¹² Day p. 286.

¹¹³ Day pp. 286-287.

¹¹⁴ Elliott *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.

the dominant cultural attitudes and practices they encounter through their choice of dressing in drag. These themes can also be tied to the costuming choices of the drag queens as a way to interpret their performative styles in the different environments encountered in the outback. While their varying drag costumes present a way of expressing their masculinity as a performance for the benefit of outsiders, the audacious and colourful dresses also show their rebellion towards assimilation and conforming to one single cultural or social perspective. Their drag costumes act as a protective barrier to unfamiliar people by casting a deliberate image for everyone to judge at a superficial level, giving a level of anonymity as if hiding behind a mask. Despite their refusal to assimilate on cultural levels, Adam, Tick and Bernadette still hold the traditional values of 'mateship', 'equality' and a 'fair go' in high esteem. Although they continually antagonise each other as a form of entertainment there is an unspoken level of tolerance that only Adam feels the need to push in an effort to amuse himself. This also demonstrates the general social equality within the group; although there is a hierarchy, there is a mutual respect between each of the drag queens not to overstep the line or aggravate each other except in harmless fun. A 'fair go' translates in the way the drag queens treat all they meet on their travels, always trying to anticipate the good in people rather than expect the worst. However, this often leads to confrontations, solidifying the drag queens' status as outsiders. To begin, they are reasonably open about parading about in drag through Broken Hill. However, their assimilation into this culture is not as accepted as they believe it will be, finding the bus graffitied in Broken Hill with the message 'aids fuckers go home!' to which Tick remarks that no matter how tough he thinks he is getting it still hurts to be reminded he is an outsider.

Ward notes that many conservatives during the Cold War became almost hysterical at the nation's new stance in international relations.¹¹⁵ The post-war period brought about Menzies' 'populate or perish' philosophy, playing on the fear that if the nation did not take control of the continent, they must accept the probability that it could be taken from them by outsiders.¹¹⁶ During this period,

¹¹⁵ Russell Ward *A Nation for a Continent: the history of Australia, 1901-1975* (Richmond, VIC: Heineman Education Australia, 1977) p. 403.

¹¹⁶ Day p. 270.

conservatives did not have to work hard to convince the population of a serious potential threat by outsiders on the continent.¹¹⁷ The migration program had unintentionally changed the construct of Australian society, undermining the former Anglo-Celtic predominance. Clark argues that:

with the increase in material well-being and with the end of economic and cultural dependence on the British Isles...there developed a new confidence...[in] those who no longer needed to comfort themselves with the delusion of being 'New World'.¹¹⁸

This unprecedented affluence was built on foreign investment, which caused a fear of cultural invasion and a threat to the Australian way of life as the market was flooded by 'American news, views and attitudes'.¹¹⁹ However, Ward also notes that many regretted the loss of the simple image of the rural bushman, which still held strong links to national identity.¹²⁰ This could be seen as the reason the bush was held in such high esteem, it was a tangible dream that was tied exclusively to the nation.

While the fear of migrants as outsiders is not an issue dealt within *Priscilla* - given the only migrant shown is a Filipino mail-order bride 'Cynthia' - the principal way of life shown is of white, heterosexual males with others on the periphery. Women are not particularly present, nor are other ethnic groupings. This shows a particular dominance of a masculine performative style where Cynthia's exotic sex act is cause for entertainment rather than a reason to accept her into their society. Cynthia's role as 'the entertainment' means she cannot fully function as part of the culture outside her act, similar to the attitude taken towards the drag queens in the small towns. While her exotic show is very popular with the men of the town and draws more attention than the drag queens, Bob believes this is not the proper way for her to act as she becomes a sexual object, not simply a performer.

¹¹⁷ White; Day.

¹¹⁸ Manning Clark *A Short History of Australia* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1995) p. 292.

¹¹⁹ Russell Ward *A Nation for a Continent* p. 370.

¹²⁰ Russell Ward *A Nation for a Continent* p. 370.

In each rural town the drag queens encounter a predetermined prejudice against them for being different and posing a threat to the townsfolks' traditional way of life. Recognising that the drag queens are outsiders, the patrons of the Broken Hill pub openly discriminate against the performers, telling them they are not welcome. The drag queens' style of performance changes to prove they can interact with rural people just as easily as each other. This shows a need to protect a way of life by their own means, rather than relying on others to be accepting, hinting this discrimination is not limited to masculine efforts. The town's performativity is collectively masculine as no one is willing to accept the outsiders as equal, proposing that individuals are unwilling to challenge the status quo, as shown in the conservative historical trends of the post war period.

Ties to the bush and a fear of outsiders has been lessened by what Day identified as an increase in sympathy by white Australians for their indigenous counterparts and 'a willingness to rethink the 'White Australia Policy'.'¹²¹ This was seen as a reflection of the Australian public's confidence in the ability to secure their claim upon the continent.¹²² While ties with Britain were being severed in favour of the Australian way of life, Day states that people believed this showed the nation becoming more culturally eclectic and embracing minorities, yet there is little evidence of this.¹²³ Welsh also discusses the impact of immigration on the nation as impressive, changing Australia from a 'colonial backwater' to a multicultural society. He goes on to indicate this is only evident in metropolitan areas, while in rural areas, the traditional 'white' Australian customs still hold strong.¹²⁴ Eventually, the historic sense of an external threat was weakened, and Australians were becoming more comfortable with their place in the world. This attitude is reflected in Day's proposition that "there was also increasingly public acceptance of homosexuality by a society that had previously flaunted its masculinity". The fear of outsiders appeared to be dwindling on some levels, at least in some sections of society.¹²⁵ However, there has been little discussion of the acceptance of homosexuality aside from Day's consideration.

¹²¹ Day p. 289.

¹²² Day p. 270.

¹²³ Day pp. 289-290.

¹²⁴ Frank Welsh *Great Southern Land* (Australia: Allen Lane, 2004) p. 504.

¹²⁵ Day p. 294.

While historians Welsh and Day argue that the fear of outsiders was lessening due to relaxed feelings about migrants and aborigines, this is not particularly evident in *Priscilla*.¹²⁶ In each of the small towns visited, there is little demonstration of any understanding or tolerance of outsiders, the anomaly being 'Bob'. As a well-travelled and open-minded man, Bob is accepting of the drag queens, even excited at their presence, and does not consider them a threat to his way of life. This contrasts to the rural townspeople, who seem to tolerate the drag queens' presence to an extent, yet when it becomes apparent they are not going to back down and conform to the rural cultural style, the level of understanding and acceptance of their presence is lost. The collective masculine style of the townspeople often changes depending on the level of drunkenness of the population in each town. In Coober Pedy, the men at the drive in are initially playful with Adam's flirtations, unaware of his status. However, once this is realised, they turn on the intruder and attempt to violently abuse him before Bernadette steps in. In questioning their masculinity and homophobia without signs of fear, Bernadette issues a challenge to their collective performance through the assertion of her own performative style, and possibly becoming more respected in the process. Bernadette shows her outsider status as something she is proud of and later commenting that the 'vile stink hole' of a city 'takes care of them' compared to the toughness of the outback.

The most open relationship between outsiders in the film is highlighted with the drag queens' meeting 'Neville', a member of an outback aboriginal tribe, who readily offers them assistance without hesitation. Neville is very reassuring about not to be afraid to become a part of his culture, and embraces their way of life by dressing up with them to perform. It is clear that everyone is enjoying the occasion, dancing and clapping along while some members of the tribe play traditional instruments and sing along. The film depicts stereotypical images of aboriginals out on the land, enjoying their own company and culture rather than integrating with other cultures in a town setting. This was a general image presented by historians before the influence of post-colonial approaches,

¹²⁶ Welsh pp. 503-505; Day pp. 286-290.

showing indigenous Australians as uncivilised compared with white Australians.¹²⁷ However, in allowing the drag queens into their society, the Aboriginals show acceptance and understanding, recognising their similar status as outsiders. They also show tolerance by openly discussing each other's choice of lifestyle in a friendly manner. In this case, there is either open acknowledgment of each other's performative masks, or little need for them as each culture is openly accepting of the other, and the drag queens can be themselves rather than the two-dimensional image presented to the public when they perform. A particular function the film executes is to deal with these ideas of assimilation and a fear of outsiders. These translate well to ideas about homophobia and trying to fit in to a white, masculine patriarchal society such as Australia, where anyone who does not conform is considered an 'outsider'. The relaxed and friendly atmosphere of this scene, and welcoming of each group as outsiders and equals is not one covered in many traditional histories of aboriginal people or histories of the early colonial period, though this has been more common in the work of revisionist historians such as Henry Reynolds.¹²⁸ In contrast to the pub in Broken Hill, the aboriginals are more welcoming, recognizing the similarity in their situations. The drag queens, in their own unique style, challenge their status as outsiders and refuse to assimilate fully, recognising that doing so would mean a loss of identity and a weakening of their own styles of masculinity. Although there is potential for acceptance, the film shows reluctance to fully recognise the cultural potential of outsiders, showing that for all the claims history has made about multiculturalism and integration of other cultures, Australia still seems likely to keep one single culture as dominant, at least in the outback.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ For the most extreme case, see Keith Windschuttle *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Australia: Macleay Press 2002). However, this is a very biased and subjective piece of work.

¹²⁸ See: Henry Reynolds *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European* (Australia: University of NSW Press, 2006); Henry Reynolds *Dispossession: Black Australians and white invaders* (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1989); Henry Reynolds *Aboriginal sovereignty reflections on race, state, and nation* (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996).

¹²⁹ More recent historians such as Welsh and Day make broad claims about multiculturalism but there has been little evidence.

Deconstructing the Myth

The outback of Australia has often been romanticised in literature as a place where men prove themselves by enduring its tough conditions. Much of this came out of dissatisfaction with city living, similar to the identification with ‘the bushman’ as an idealistic version of masculinity, as outlined in the previous chapter. However, *Priscilla* dispels many of these myths, depicting the journey into the outback as a tough one that is not made by just one kind of man as history could make anyone believe.¹³⁰ This traditional kind of man, represented in a specific image by many other films set in the outback, has become an allegory for what it means to journey into such an environment. The drag queens challenge this by enduring the harshness of the outback in their own particular way, highlighting their unique styles of masculinity as drag performers in relation to more traditional ones. The film highlights the harsh reality of rural attitudes and culture, while deconstructing the romanticised myths of the bush, challenging the images of masculinity.

Martyn Lyons and Penny Russell note that:

Australia has historically been a highly urbanised society, although its economy has depended upon the rural industries of pastoralism and mining as much as its cultural nationalism has drawn from the powerful mythology of the bush.¹³¹

This comment sums up the attitude towards the bush represented in many Australian literary works and a general attitude reflected in historical works dealing with the era of post-war national identity formation. From Henry Lawson to Russell Ward, the bush has been mythologised as a romantic place where men are made through enduring hardship and proving one’s masculinity. Yet these images are not without their problems. Ward’s *The Australian Legend* is credited by Marilyn Lake as mythologising pastoral workers as cultural heroes, linking

¹³⁰ Histories such as Russell Ward and Richard White as well as Manning Clark *History of Australia* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962).

¹³¹ Martyn Lyons & Penny Russell *Australia’s history: themes and debates* (Australia: University NSW Press: 2005) pp xvi-xvii.

male cultural practices with a national tradition.¹³² Graeme Davison (as cited by Lake) also argues that the context in which Ward's work was published shows the unique situation it was placed in. This was a period where the nation was solidifying its identity on an international level and so Ward's work presented something to put up as the blueprint for national identity. Davison argues that it became romantic due to an 'urban malaise', dissatisfaction of city living, that saw the bush as something better.¹³³ The problem with this is that rather than truly experiencing the bush, many thought about it with a 'grass is greener' mentality, meaning people idealise what they want over what they have. The dissatisfaction of such a mundane and ordinary way of life may have sparked cultural ties to the bush as the epitome of existence, yet few ventured out from the cities where the bulk of the population resided. White argues that this image had a fall from grace in the late 1960s, during a period of social and cultural upheaval as a result of the Vietnam War, where a worldwide dissident youth culture showed general dissatisfaction with current trends in their way of life.¹³⁴ At this same point in time, Australia was beginning to establish itself on an international scale by cutting colonial ties with Britain and establishing its place in the Pacific. Other national history texts, like *The Australian Legend*, also hold romanticised ideals, promoting a white male identity as one the cultural hero should live up to. Lake argues this is shown in the influential texts of Lawson and Ward and therein establishing a national character.¹³⁵ Lake notes in particular the work of Lawson heavily alluding to the pleasures of a nomadic existence and emphasising the bonds of 'mateship' over family life.¹³⁶

Frank Welsh discusses the idea of mateship with regard to Henry Lawson, who expressed the idea that 'mateship' was, at the time he was writing, beginning to be regarded in some ways as a construct particular to Australia. It was also

¹³² Marilyn Lake "Historical reconsiderations IV: The politics of respectability: Identifying the masculinist context" in *Australian Historical Studies*, Volume 22, Issue 86 (1986) p. 117.

¹³³ Graeme Davison, as cited in Marilyn Lake "Historical reconsiderations IV: The politics of respectability: Identifying the masculinist context" in *Australian Historical Studies*, Volume 22, Issue 86 (1986) p. 117.

¹³⁴ White pp. 158-162.

¹³⁵ Lake pp. 116-121.

¹³⁶ Lake p. 121.

something that embodied the virtues of the hardy bushmen. Welsh also implies that Lawson explored a relegation of women to a lower standard, that 'women are expected to know their place, which was emphatically not in bars'.¹³⁷ Bars were a place for men to congregate and escape, as well as a place to solidify a level of mateship through ritual drinking. This idea of mateship has been solidified in the national psyche so much so that in 1999, the then Prime Minister John Howard argued mateship should become one of the defining Australian values, formally embodied as part of the preamble in the Constitution.

Mateship, although it seems a construct of the very traditional Australian masculine performance, is drawn on heavily in a variety of ways throughout *Priscilla*. This is achieved for example in the interaction of the drag queens with each other, and the acceptance of Bob onto the bus. Though this is not represented in the same way as traditional brotherly type mateship between two men, as exemplified in Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* (1981), different levels are explored through various levels of relationship between the drag queens and Bob.¹³⁸ Bob's level of intimacy with each of the drag queens is respectful and chivalrous, though mostly obvious in his performance towards Bernadette, with whom he is the most considerate and genuine. While Bob encourages the drag queens to perform at the pub for the townspeople, they are more interested in the sexually explicit act of Bob's wife Cynthia. The stunned reaction of the townspeople clearly shows that the drag queens are as unwelcome in the bar as women who are not there purely for entertainment.

Journeying to the bush was seen as a way to prove oneself, with many venturing out from urban areas to escape the business of the city for pleasure rather than work. Many of these journeys were made with the creature comforts of home in a car or four-wheel drive, hence the term 'bush bashing' as a way to explore one's own masculinity.¹³⁹ Day argues that the Vietnam War had left Australians with little to celebrate, especially in terms of their masculinity, which prompted an

¹³⁷ Welsh p. 315.

¹³⁸ George Miller *Mad Max* (Australia: Crossroads, 1979).

¹³⁹ Day p. 306.

increasing need for establishing traditional ways to ‘make men’.¹⁴⁰ The journey the drag queens make is all about self-discovery and enjoying the adventure of the outback. Although the pink bus is not a traditional vehicle for this kind of adventure, it is equally as useful as a four-wheel drive in the sense that it protects the occupants from the elements. Their trek up King’s Canyon, aids in the drag queens’ reclaiming some of their exaggerated performativity and theatricality as they realise their goal of each being “a cock, on a rock, in a frock”.¹⁴¹ The drag queens contrast strongly with their surroundings, they do not look like they belong with such elaborate costumes, but as they reach the crest of the canyon to witness the sunset, the drag queens begin to fade into the scenery slightly. This makes them seem as though they belong in this environment and their journey is over in some ways. During the journey, they each come to grips with their own identity and grow a respect for each other as individuals, not simply the two-dimensional stage characters of their performances. In essence, they are performing the same journey that many have before, though in their own way, embracing their performativity as drag queens and proving that the outback does not make one type of masculinity.

A Homogenous Australia

This section deconstructs the romantic and idealistic myth of rural life and, in the process, exposes its ingrained intolerance. This attitude is fostered through a fear of outsiders, as discussed earlier, and the threat to a particular ‘way of life’ by the unknown. The wider implications of tension between different social and cultural groupings become apparent when they are put in a position where they must interact, and where neither group are fully sure how to respond. Intolerance is further cultivated by the competitiveness of Australian masculinity, where many see a threat to their way of life as a way to prove themselves through a show of competitiveness and aggressiveness. However, intolerance is not limited to one group of society but many, it has numerous manifestations throughout the film, beginning with a performance in the city met with little recognition, prompting

¹⁴⁰ Day pp. 280-284.

¹⁴¹ Elliott *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.

the initial disconcerted agreement for the trip. Though the drag queens are met with varying levels of intolerance in each of the outback towns they visit, there is also a high level of friction between Tick, Adam and Bernadette as they compete to stir up each other.

Richard White argues that during the 1960s, racial exclusiveness and intolerance was waning; yet this was hard to see.¹⁴² Writing almost two decades later, considering the predominance of white Australia, David Walker states:

Well into the 1960s the White Australia Policy was an article of faith that few politicians dared to question. The preoccupation with homogeneity, whiteness and racial purity undermines Australia's troubled identity as a white settler society.¹⁴³

The variation in attitudes shows some recognition that Australia's history can be interpreted in vastly different ways, highlighting varied levels of intolerance depending on the leanings of the author. It is hard to find authors who are openly critical of the level of intolerance in Australian culture, but the main topics of interest include aboriginals, the 'ocker' and drinking. While Day hints at more progressive ways of thinking due to a 'sexual revolution' in the 1970s, and an acceptance of the nation as multicultural and open to equality, *Priscilla* highlights that many of these intolerances may still be present in Australian culture.

The level of intolerance regarding the aborigines stems back to colonial ideology, but post-war influences brought this into national focus. The 1960s saw the extension of the basic human right to vote for aborigines and a ban on discrimination based on colour. While white Australians were confronted by their past indiscretions and were prepared to offer sympathy, they were not ready to offer land rights.¹⁴⁴ It is unclear whether the Australian public really cared

¹⁴² White p. 166.

¹⁴³ David Walker "Australia's Asian futures" in Martyn Lyons & Penny Russell (eds) *Australia's history: themes and debates* (Australia: University NSW Press: 2005) p. 64.

¹⁴⁴ Day p. 168.

about these actions or whether they were simply tolerating the changes for the sake of appearances. This viewpoint is solidified by Day, who argues that:

Some Australians saw the demand for land rights as posing a potent threat to their proprietorship of the continent, while others sensed that an accommodation with the aborigines would make their proprietorship more, rather than less, secure.¹⁴⁵

Public sympathy for aboriginals increased but the official reaction was mixed, for though many believed in equality they were not ready to grant full rights. This was still evident on the bicentennial anniversary of the First Fleet in January, 1988, where:

In an explicit rejection of that original supplanting of their [aboriginal] sovereignty over the continent, more than 20 000 aboriginal people and their supporters marched behind a flag of their own...they argued that the anniversary of their dispossession was not a cause for celebration but a cause for sorrow.¹⁴⁶

Despite the idea that aboriginal policy, in theory, promoted integration rather than assimilation, official attitudes remained paternalistic. However, they allowed for maintenance of cultural identity and it was assumed that similar attitudes were extended towards migrants. White states:

By the early 1970s, Australia was being promoted as a pluralistic, tolerant, multicultural society, although it did not reflect any real improvement in the position of Aborigines and migrants, most of whom remained on the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder.¹⁴⁷

The image of a pluralistic society is countered by *Priscilla* as the drag queens encounter different minority cultures that are located on the outskirts of white outback society. The conservative ways of thinking discussed by Day may have fostered intolerance towards indigenous Australians but also provided the catalyst for the understanding of minority cultures exhibited by the drag queens. With the aboriginal community they are apprehensive at first, feeling out of place in regular clothes, once in drag and performing, the drag queens feel more

¹⁴⁵ Day p. 290.

¹⁴⁶ Day p. 311.

¹⁴⁷ White p. 169.

comfortable. The level of tolerance exposed by both cultures is highlighted by the integration of traditional instruments and chanting with Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive" as Tick, Adam and Bernadette perform with Neville.¹⁴⁸ Neville is not inhibited by his culture as he dances along on his own to begin with and is more than happy to become part of the spectacle as the drag queens put on their show. This emphasises the mutual acceptance each cultural group has for each other and the respect for each other's lifestyle. There is no threat level exhibited by either cultural grouping, though it is clear that the aboriginals have been separated from white outback society, choosing to live on the land rather than in the town. There is little exploration of aboriginal affairs aside from the recognition that both groups are outsiders, and on some level, they are superficial and stereotypical representations of aboriginals. However, the effect the drag queens and aboriginals have on each other's masculine performativity is impressive. They each appropriate performance aspects of the other culture, singing, chanting, dancing, clapping, and make it their own, realising their kindred status as outsiders. The drag queens also recognise they do not have to exaggerate their performance to show their identity in such a harsh environment.

The drag queens' interaction with Bob's Filipino wife Cynthia is the strangest of the film, as they do not understand her. Initially, they are confused by Bob's insisting that his wife keep quiet, with the only explanation that she has 'a problem with alcohol' and is not allowed at the pub anymore. It is later revealed that Bob is the one who does not allow Cynthia into the establishment, as she becomes an exhibitionist for the all male audience by performing an explicit ping-pong ball show. This altercation highlights the sexualised nature of performativity in the film and shows a change in the representation of the drag queens as they are initially sexually explicit around each other as a way to perform their masculinity, but this wanes as they grow tired. The drag queens rely on their sexuality as a way of enhancing their performance of masculinity. In caricaturing themselves and overacting as a way to show their theatricality, yet they do this less explicitly than Cynthia, who makes her performativity more enticing to the men of the bar through graphically exploiting herself sexually for

¹⁴⁸ Freddie Perren and Dino Fekaris "I Will Survive" on Gloria Gaynor's *Love Tracks* (Polydor, 1978).

the purpose of entertainment and her own need to be the centre of attention. The performativity of drag is different to performativity of females. Drag can still be understood as the caricature of a female but also signals that the performers are still male.

The national character of the 'ocker' has been identified by White to have 'originated as a satire on Australian boorishness, but became an 'affectionate tribute to the national identity' in the sense that it became a celebrated national icon.¹⁴⁹ Advertising jingles often made use of the 'ignorant ocker image' as a promotional tool and immortalized it as a relaxed descendent of soldiers from Gallipoli, and promoted a particular way of life.¹⁵⁰ Welsh identifies a small trend under Prime Minister Harold Holt of progressive thinking through the push for rights for aboriginals, but after his disappearance, the movement lost steam.¹⁵¹ However, the influence of this forward thinking may have rubbed off on some Australians. This is most exemplified by Bob in his openness by asking permission to question Bernadette about her choices without pressure and does not judge her answers. He is chivalrous towards the drag queens and treats them all with respect, which he gets back in turn. A relaxed man, who enjoys his drink and a good time, Bob embodies the warmth of the ocker and the laid back way of life that is thoroughly accepting of outsiders. This aligns with David Coad's analysis of Bob's personality in *Gender Trouble Down Under*, where he describes Bob as a real Australian man, easily recognised as an 'Aussie bloke'. However, in Coad's explanation of 'beer-swilling ockerdom' and Australian masculinity, as having a uniform of 'a broad-rimmed hat, a grubby singlet, boots and nearly always a beard, Bob does not exactly fit.¹⁵² Bob is the only man in the bar enjoying the drag queens' performance, making him slightly odd compared with the other local men. This peculiarity is exemplified by Bob's choice of clothing, which seems odd as he wears a bright printed shirt and dark beret rather than the grubby singlet and broad hat.

¹⁴⁹ White p. 170.

¹⁵⁰ Day p. 298.

¹⁵¹ Welsh pp. 492-493.

¹⁵² David Coad *Gender Trouble Down Under: Australian masculinities* (France: Presses Universitaires de Valenciennes, 2002) p. 133.

Coad's analysis of Bob also contradicts the image presented in *Priscilla* in stating that Australian masculinity:

Covers specific jobs and occupations, like mining and car repairs. Leisure time is spent in pubs, swilling back the local lager. Masculinity is associated with verbal and physical violence, finding a 'Sheila' and homophobia.¹⁵³

While Bob loosely conforms to the first two sentences of this perspective, he in no way associates himself with violence as a form of either entertainment or homophobia. He does his best to protect Adam from other men at the Coober Pedy drive-in who do conform wholly to Coad's image of masculinity.

Contrastingly, Welsh highlights the 'larrikin' as an urbanised version of the bushranger, however, as mentioned in the previous chapter, this hints at a more sinister and less tolerant representation of masculinity. *Priscilla* utilises this image through the small town characters the drag queens meet along their journey. The intolerant men they meet conform to a larrikin representation of masculinity, drinking together in a closed-off culture and openly hostile to outsiders. Lake shows an insight into this, arguing that Australian men were more likely to get drunk when drinking together, and how the pub was seen as a haven for men after a hard day's work. Beer was the only choice for consumption, and intruders (particularly women or outsiders) were not welcome or tolerated as the pastime developed into a masculine practice, "if life could not be lived on men's terms then it was not worth living".¹⁵⁴

Many historians note the apparent sexual revolution during the 1970s as the contraceptive pill became available and women had more rights over their own bodies.¹⁵⁵ This is true in relation to *Priscilla* in the character of Adam, the youngest of the drag queens, who has led a comparatively more sheltered life than Bernadette. After the incident in Coober Pedy that leaves Adam beaten by some local men, Bernadette consoles Adam, imploring him to let the situation toughen him rather than drag him down, and telling him she has only become

¹⁵³ Coad, p. 133.

¹⁵⁴ Lake p. 128.

¹⁵⁵ Day p. 284.

hard because she was forced to. Ward's idea that 'young people lived far more free and less inhibited lives than ever before' appears highly problematic.¹⁵⁶ In many Australian films, there is little evidence of this kind of sexual tolerance, and the hierarchical social structures explored often reinforce the hegemonic masculine performativity rather than exhibit any sexual freedom.¹⁵⁷ This is also quite obvious in the film through the inability of many rural towns to accept the performers into their culture; fearful of the threat posed to their way of life.

The 1990s brought the hope of change and understanding under Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke, who was interested in promoting a genuine equality among all citizens, as seen in the work of Day and Welsh.¹⁵⁸ This contrasted strongly with his predecessor Malcolm Fraser, who Manning Clark faults with playing on the fears of those who had something to lose by tolerating equality. Clark also cites Hawke as creating a revolution in the Australian way of life, occurring outside of politics in the areas of transport, communication and manufacturing, and creating the 'comfortable classes' of Australia.¹⁵⁹ Lyons and Russell argue that multiculturalism in Australia encouraged respect for cultural difference, whilst also recognising the distinct path of the nation's social development.¹⁶⁰ However, there is little evidence of this shown in the film as the drag queens are continually discriminated against for being outsiders. The level of tolerance spoken of in the national histories may be the official stance, but *Priscilla* does show that there is a general intolerance towards outsiders still very present in rural cultures.

Conclusions

¹⁵⁶ Ward *A nation for a continent* p. 383.

¹⁵⁷ Miller *Mad Max* Bruce Beresford *Puberty Blues* (Australia: Limelight Productions, 1981); Steve Jodrell *Shame* (Australia: Barron Entertainment, 1988); Geoffery Wright *Romper Stomper* (Australia: Australian Film Commission, 1992).

¹⁵⁸ Welsh p. 531-554; Day p. 326-330.

¹⁵⁹ Clark *A Short History of Australia* p. 295-303.

¹⁶⁰ Lyons & Russell p. xvi.

Over time, assimilation and a fear of outsiders had fostered a general attitude of intolerance. Although many writers assume that this trend was waning, the film still shows there is evidence of these feelings present in rural areas. While the film explores the levels of intolerance that outsiders face and the recognition of similarities between various groups of outsiders, at the same time, it highlights a liberal attitude that has the potential to lessen the need for performative masks. While these masks were used as a way to prove masculinity or hide a true identity that may be discriminated against, progressive modes of thought decreased the need to hide true identity and one's style of performative masculinity. This chapter has argued that the film offers various insights into the emotional psyche of its characters as a way for viewers to fully engage with the images on screen as a culturally representative text of the period it was constructed. The masking techniques used to adapt traditional images of Australian masculine performance highlighted in the film also speak to national concerns about identity and who 'we' are as Australians, questioning the foundations of these national images and appropriating them to a new, and more fluid way of thinking about masculinity and the performance of identity. The use of costumes throughout *Priscilla* is exemplary in considering the relationships between performative masculinity and the way masks are employed throughout the film as a defence mechanism. The journey that the drag queens take shows a misconception about rural society, that it is not necessarily the romanticised myth that is celebrated in national texts. In fully understanding their environment, the drag queens are able to assimilate into the value systems of outback culture, even if they cannot embody all the characteristics of the rural townspeople they meet. This idea links to the following chapter, which explores the role of the environment in the shaping of a masculine performance

Wide Open Spaces:
The Australian Landscape's Influence on Masculine
Performativity in *Mad Max* and *The Adventures of*
Priscilla, Queen of the Desert

As the previous chapter argued, rural and outback identities have often been romanticised in history. This romantic trend also extends to the way historians have discussed the nation's landscape. Therefore, much of this chapter centres on an exploration into the relationship between Australia's history and the role of location in relation to the performance of masculinity. The key themes of environment, the unfamiliar and the personal journey provide the basis for investigating Australian history surrounding the influence of landscape on the performance of Australian masculinity. Landscape plays an important role in the journey that many take into the unknown wilderness of the Australian outback and other barren rural areas. A lack of development and civilisation points to the solitary nature of the journey and emphasises the bleakness of the landscape. It offers the exploration a physical journey where the performance of masculinity is shaped and enhanced as the journey develops. This also provides the opportunity for an exploration of the desert as a metaphor for a lost state of mind and sense of identity. The theme of isolation as an influence on personal journey is also important to the performance of masculinity. While the journey is made on an individual level, it is also made as part of a collective. This is done through various encounters with others in the landscape who may not have large roles but are still an important part of the journey. Yet this also reinforces ingrained gender roles, explicit in the lack of feminine identities in a rough environment. The roughness of the environment had a masculinising effect, creating men who were tough and strong, and showed the nature of Australian identity adapting to the meet the harsh standards the landscape offered.

I examine the influence of land to the rural landscape of *Mad Max* (1979) and the outback landscape of *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), and explore how they aid in the influence of the range of performances masculinity can have.¹⁶¹ Unlike the previous chapters, here I compare and contrast the two case study films rather than analysing them separately as, in this case, they deal with similar themes of landscape. Both films depict a distinction between an uninviting rural or outback setting and a more comfortable beach or city setting, which highlights the impact a difference in location can give. This contrast shows the degree to which Australians are often ‘out of their element’, that is, out of their familiar comfort zones. Through the characters’ confrontation with a harsh landscape, the chapter investigates how encounters with this kind of environment have historically been influential in constructing masculinity. This links into ideas about colonialism that have thoroughly been explored in Australian historiography, particularly in the work of Chris Healy.¹⁶² The impact of the ‘journey’ in both films plays an important role in the construction of the performance of masculinity; the journey appears to re-establish gender roles, yet also challenges them by personalising the experience for each character.

A Harsh Environment

The land has always played an important role in the construction of masculinity in the Australian context, specifically relating to historical memory. Paula Hamilton identifies two trends relating to historical memory; the recording of oral histories, and the ‘collective remembering on a national scale’.¹⁶³ This second trend, as noted by Hamilton, has been used in Australia as a way to express identity in relation to things that can be physically interacted with, such as the landscape. Despite the majority of the population living in metropolitan

¹⁶¹ George Miller *Mad Max* (Australia: Crossroads, 1979); Stephan Elliott *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Australia: Polygram, 1994).

¹⁶² Chris Healy *From the ruins of colonialism: history as social memory* (Australia: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 165.

¹⁶³ Paula Hamilton “The Knife Edge: Debates about Memory and History” in Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (eds) *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 17.

and coastal areas, the rural lifestyle and the outback have been idealised as a cornerstone of national identity. Both have been romanticised in historical literature and cultural texts, and this works to reinforce the impact of the land as part of a national identity.¹⁶⁴ According to this understanding the harshness of a desolate environment is what created men and shaped the performance of masculinity in such a way that men became like the land, rough and isolated. The land itself became an influence on masculinity, shaping and informing the way it was constructed as part of a performance. In a similar fashion to the rural identities being celebrated as cultural icons, the outback landscape and other deserted rural areas have often been painted as iconic.¹⁶⁵ This contrasts sharply to the more habitable locations in cities and along the coast, where much of the population resided, as these are depicted in the case study films as comfortable, stable spaces. The characters of each film note the familiarity of these surroundings as secure, but must make the expedition out into the unknown for the sake of personal exploration. Here, through consideration of how the land is used as an element of performance in both films, the emphasis is placed on the historical importance of land on Australian masculine performativity.

The theme of location is central to the Australian histories of Ward and Clark, who use it as a link to national identity.¹⁶⁶ Yet, it is often overlooked as culturally significant due to the nation's preoccupation with solidifying a national identity to present on an international scale, as seen in the attitudes of White in *Inventing Australia*.¹⁶⁷ However, the constant reinforcement of the influence of the land on identity, which often takes a masculine frame, can be seen in the continuing

¹⁶⁴ Lawson *Collected Verse*; Clark *History of Australia*; Ward *The Australian Legend*; Paterson *A vision splendid: the complete poetry of A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson*.

¹⁶⁵ Particularly in the art of John Glover, The Heidelberg School, Sidney Nolan and Russell Drysdale, who are identified as significant by Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts "Australian painters" on *Australian Cultural Portal Website* (Australian Government, 2007) <<http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/painters/>> [accessed 10 January 2010].

¹⁶⁶ Frank Welsh *Great Southern Land* (Australia: Allen Lane, 2004); Russell Ward *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978).

¹⁶⁷ Richard White *Inventing Australia* (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1981) pp. 158-171.

discussion of cultural heroes tied to the land. John Hirst, discussing Ward's *The Australian Legend*, dates this back to the pioneer image of a hardworking, resourceful and ordinary man who was associated with the land, which Ward claimed was a disproportionate influence on the shaping of an Australian mystique.¹⁶⁸ However, works of this kind, despite attempting to discredit the romantic myths solidified in history, do more to reinforce the role of the land as part of a national identity by constantly repeating the importance specific cultural icons hold. In discussing the role of film in relation to identity, Graeme Turner proposes that the nationalism of the 1980s brought a revival of 'rural-nationalist mythologies' as a way of reclaiming rural towns and the land as sites fundamental to a national character.¹⁶⁹ This revival was through the media, with Turner citing the most popular example as the Australian Broadcasting Commission's (ABC) radio show *Australia All Over*, which offered a "trip back to a time when Australians saw their culture as fundamentally rural".¹⁷⁰ This way of thinking became so popular in the 1980s that *Australia All Over* was marketed across various media, through ABC stores, all over the nation. Turner argues that whatever attitude was taken towards this product, one cannot deny it as a cultural product that revitalised nostalgic feelings of nationalism and highlighted the changes in image that its successors had made.¹⁷¹

Various historically and geographically significant locations have been used in the case study films as representative of cultural icons. This is more pronounced in *Priscilla* with its outback landscapes, yet *Mad Max* also draws on the bleak rural farmland. Both present varied images of Australia and highlight the role the landscape can play in fashioning the performance of masculinity. For example, *Mad Max* explores the more desolate landscape in its view of the barren, empty farmland with little more than a road weaving through it towards the surrounding city. This barren and sparsely settled post-apocalyptic landscape is uninviting and does not give the impression that many people would be content living in

¹⁶⁸ John Hirst "The Pioneer Legend" in Deborah Gare & David Ritter (eds) *Making Australian History: Perspectives on the Past Since 1788* (Australia: Thompson, 2008) p. 135.

¹⁶⁹ Graeme Turner *Making it National* (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994) p. 8.

¹⁷⁰ Turner p. 9.

¹⁷¹ Turner p. 9-10.

this kind of environment. The bleakness of the landscape is reflective of many attitudes in the film relating to hopelessness and a hard life for those who must live in it. There is no feminised softness in most of the film, hinting that masculinity is the thing that survives in this environment. It also does not entice those looking for comfort, rather it promotes the impression that a sense of hardiness and masculinity is needed to survive. However, *Mad Max* also provides more enticing environments that are hospitable and show a softer side to the characters. The beach where Max and Jesse's house is located creates a relaxed, family environment where the flexibility of Max's performance of masculinity is shown as he recuperates from his job and interacts happily with his family. The same tone is seen during the scene at the river when the couple discuss Max's desire to be a good man and to be honest with his wife. The use of water in each location contrasts to the harshness of the dry, deserted landscape Max works in daily. The open and relaxing environment of the beach and the sunlight and rich greenery of the river contrast to the barren landscape shown in the bulk of the film and influences Max's performance of masculinity allowing him to be relaxed and open. Here he does not need to be as aggressively masculine to perform his duty to his family, instead he can embrace his sensitive side. These images contrast with the landscape depicted in *Priscilla* which is much more unforgiving and isolated, where the land openly encourages an aggressive masculine style in order to survive. The lack of vegetation suggests there is little or no water, so only those experienced in travelling in this environment, or at least very aware of what they may encounter, will survive the harsh terrain.

This harsh environment shown in the bulk of *Priscilla* supports the proposition outlined above that the outback has an effect on those who encounter it, that is, a hardening of attitudes, physicality and appearance. The film also celebrates the ruggedness of the outback by treating the famous destinations of the outback town of Alice Springs and Kings Canyon. Both are alluring destinations in the outback, celebrated in cultural texts and historical accounts as sites of beauty and wonder. Alice Springs has embraced and tamed the outback, making it fit for human habitation, and Kings Canyon represents the romanticised view of the outback as majestic and awe inspiring in its sheer size and unspoiled views. The

inclusion of such recognisable Australian locations, and the intrusion of the drag queens as such distinctive outsiders, is an odd juxtaposition of traditional symbols and challenges to these symbols.

Australian historian's constant focus on discussion of the bush and the outback has constructed an image of cultural romanticism surrounding ties to the land. Russell Ward states that in the last century:

[M]ost writers seem to have felt strongly that the 'Australian spirit' is somehow intimately connected with the bush and that it derives rather from the commonfolk than from the more respectable and cultivated sections of society.¹⁷²

He does not mean that this is the all-encompassing version of Australian history, but strongly emphasises the importance that it has in the nation's identity. Despite Ward's claim that we should not deny nor romanticise this image, much of *The Australian Legend* is spent singing the praises of a rural identity through themes of the bushrangers and other cultural heroes tied to the land. Rather than taking either side, Ward's work reviews how history has romanticised bushmen and other nomadic outback figures in the past, and attributes the myth surrounding these images partially to the potential the landscape held for creating rough, masculine identities.¹⁷³ Ward's proposition that this was due to folk traditions rather than from the 'respectable' sections of society suggests that many of the population were not happy with their lifestyle and yearned for a different kind of life. White states that it was:

essentially the city-dweller's image of the bush, a sunlit landscape of faded blue hills, cloudless skies and noble gum trees... Australians were urged to respond to this image emotionally, as a test of their patriotism.¹⁷⁴

This was an image created by Australians themselves, not European settlers who were new to the environment but those who were born there such as Lawson and Paterson.

¹⁷² Ward *The Australian Legend* p. 15.

¹⁷³ Ward *The Australian Legend*.

¹⁷⁴ Ward *The Australian Legend* p. 85.

It is an image that *Priscilla* draws on and reinforces through the depiction of the Australian landscape. Despite the sinister tone when the drag queens encounter prejudice from most rural townsfolk, the landscape itself is often shown in highly romanticised ways. With the film's use of clear skies and perfect sunny days, coupled with the remarkable size of the outback, it is hard not to consider the images presented as aesthetically picturesque. The film challenges the view of the land as a place for heroic men like those created in the writings of Lawson and Paterson, highlighting that Australia is for all, not just those who fit the national mould. The difference between Ward and White's treatment of the outback and that of *Priscilla* is that the identities revelling in the beauty of the landscape are dressed unconventionally. To show how far out of his comfort zone he is, Tick is shown in the most unfamiliar environment for a performer, not on stage but in an isolated and dry landscape, which is also seen in the scene where the drag queens climb Kings Canyon in drag. This can be seen as a direct challenge to the national image of what it takes to be masculine in the harsh Australian outback.

Recent historians such as Day, Lake and Welsh have continually come to address the problems with a national myth of the bush as the cornerstone of identity.¹⁷⁵ The romantic visions of wide, open spaces for anyone to stake claim to have been problematised as Australia became one of the most urbanised nations.¹⁷⁶ Turner notes how difficult it is to 'denaturalise' the established imagery of the bush that has been celebrated throughout history, stating:

The history of the 'uses' of nationalism over the last decade highlights, not only these discourses' monolithic predictability, but their canny flexibility, their readiness for continual appropriation and deployment as they participate in the construction of a national culture.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ See: Marilyn Lake "Historical reconsiderations IV: The politics of respectability: Identifying the masculinist context" in *Australian Historical Studies*, Volume 22, Issue 86 (1986) pp 116-131; Day; Frank Welsh *Great Southern Land* (Australia: Allen Lane, 2004).

¹⁷⁶ Martyn Lyons and Penny Russell (eds) *Australia's history: themes and debates* (Australia: University NSW Press: 2005) p. xvi.

¹⁷⁷ Turner p. 10.

The conventional discourses surrounding what the nation has come to mean are held in place by cultural and social beliefs. These are utilised by political and ideological groups to constantly strengthen a national image, and are, therefore, hard to demystify.¹⁷⁸

The opposition to this is explored in *Mad Max*, where rural landscapes are depicted in less than idyllic circumstances of near poverty and harsh living conditions. This film goes against many of the mythologised beliefs of a rural lifestyle as something desirable. None of the characters seem particularly tied to the land in the same way as conventional representations in the past have been; for instance there are no farmers or pastoral workers. With *Mad Max* set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, it is hard to find any of the cultural romanticism that is so obvious in *Priscilla*. There are not many wide-sweeping images of the land set to epic music to inspire nostalgia, and the majority of landscape views are of empty grasslands with roads cutting their way through. The characters with the strongest relationship to the land, as semi-nomadic and shown without a steady home, are the biker gang. Despite sharing similar wandering characteristics of pastoral workers and bushmen, they are nowhere near the celebrated images of the past.¹⁷⁹ The fear of their presence causes towns to become deserted, and their unkempt, animalistic look does not particularly conform to any images of a cultural hero. There is no romantic imagery shown in the rural town the bikers invade. These do not look like the cultural heroes of the bushranger or ocker, nor does the landscape seem inspirational. In a way, this shows dissatisfaction with the historical images of a national character and can be read as a challenge to previous depictions of cultural identities.

One of the main concerns of history had been that the harsh environment depicts masculinity; the outback, the bush and other rural areas are meant for 'real men'. The problem with this is that it is never clear what constitutes a 'real man'

¹⁷⁸ Turner pp. 10-14.

¹⁷⁹ Lake discusses the ideals of a nomadic lifestyle coveted by nineteenth-century Australian men, p. 120-123.

without resorting to one-dimensional cultural stereotypes.¹⁸⁰ It does not consider the different kinds of influence the environment can have, and makes the assumption that only one type of masculinity can be present as 'real'. This also does not consider the level of authority that land can hold over the performance of masculinity and whether it may effect the individual in different ways. This is a key area where performativity provides a useful concept to explore the versatility of masculine identities. To borrow Ward's phrase, the 'brute facts of Australian geography' were important in shaping many masculine performances.¹⁸¹ The lack of rain and vast distances meant that most of the habitable land was thinly settled by pastoral workers. This created a stronger masculine image and style of performativity as those who lived and worked in rural and outback areas had to contend with a harsh environment, which caused them to work harder to reap the benefits. Many did not make long expeditions across country until expanding transport opportunities created highways and railways linking cities. This opened up the nation to a more comfortable and convenient manner of travel, sheltered from some of the harsh landscape that had prevented many from making such long trips in the past. The ease of travel into once inhospitable environments promoted the agenda of occupying the 'empty spaces' and 'subduing the wilderness' as a form of defence from potential invaders. This also meant spreading out to take control of the continent, rather than confining the population to the previously settled areas, and learning how to work with the land rather than hesitate to venture into it.¹⁸² Day argues that many attempts were made to encourage settlement further inland, yet drought and land degradation led many Australians to abandon their 'idyllic notions' of securing the whole of the continent through farming. Gough Whitlam's response was to attempt decentralisation of urban growth by strategically inflating key towns across the interior of the continent, 'creating cities in the bush', though Day argues that these ideas did not take hold.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ In his second edition of *Masculinities* (2005) Connell problematises the concept of the 'real man' in a section entitled "True Masculinity" Robert Connell *Masculinities* 2nd edition (USA: University of California Press, 2005) pp. 45-46.

¹⁸¹ Ward *A nation for a continent* p. 32.

¹⁸² Day p. 275-273.

¹⁸³ Day p. 296.

The sparseness of settlement in *Priscilla* and the amount of driving across desolate wastelands between locations shows that past political strategies to decentralise the population did not take. When the bus breaks down, Bernadette must walk a long way to find help, across unfamiliar and unforgiving terrain. Recognising the predicament the travellers would be in if the bus should break down in the wrong place, Bob agrees to accompany the drag queens. This shows an understanding of the harshness of the elements the outback landscape can potentially have and a desire to help in case of emergency. This also shows the threat of potential invaders was not something for the nation to worry about as none but hardy Australian settlers venture inland to establish themselves. In the post-apocalyptic world of *Mad Max*, the lack of settlement is shown in the chase scenes, where there is simply open road and no civilisation. The place where Max's family is settled is along the coast, similar to the general population of the nation throughout Australia's history. Again, this shows that despite the best intentions of the past, the nation did not want to spread out. The reputation for the land to be unforgiving and isolating is investigated through both films where the rural and outback landscapes are explored. This is a consideration addressed more so in *Priscilla* by the drag queens as they are more conscious of their decision to make the journey. The characters are not afraid to venture into the relatively unknown to take on whatever the landscape could throw at them.

Writing in the early 1980s, Richard White notes "the image of 'the Australian way of life' was closely related to the image of Australia as a sophisticated, urban, industrialised consumer society".¹⁸⁴ Frank Welsh considers this in his book *Great Southern Land: A New History of Australia*, stating that:

Australia had become primarily an urban nation, with 35 per cent of the population living in the capital cities...[people] sought solace in claiming kin with the hardy men of the outback, the shearers, drovers and range-riders.¹⁸⁵

However, many other writers at this time were still concentrating on promoting an outback and rural image of the nation, which can be seen as a reflection of the

¹⁸⁴ White p.162.

¹⁸⁵ Welsh pp. 314-315.

lessening of ties to their British colonial heritage.¹⁸⁶ Contrasting to this assertion of national identity was a dissatisfaction with city living where space became an issue as the population began to ‘creak’ under the pressure of city living. The theme of dissatisfaction with city living translated to ideas of aggression and violence influencing masculinity, but it also fostered a sense of pride in being able to withstand the rough environment of rural living. The harshness of the land made it hard to leave the creature comforts of suburbia, yet the ideals of rural living were held in high regard. While suburbia became the ideal for Australians, many still held true to their rural roots and felt a tie to the land and the outback rather than the city, despite rarely venturing away from the comforts the city provided.¹⁸⁷ Clark argues that a national assimilation into suburbia was the fate of Australia, rather than conforming to the rural image of identity being tied to the bush, which had previously been such a large part of national identity. The spirit of the 1970s was to gain all the luxuries of suburbia and foster family values.¹⁸⁸ As the foundation of a new Australian identity, this idea of a suburban way of life challenges the myths of the bush and the outback as the cornerstone of national identity.

The problem, as identified by Marilyn Lake writing in the 1980s, was that suburbia was seen as something to avoid in favour of the nomadic lifestyle of rural living.¹⁸⁹

Lake’s idea of ‘urban malaise’ is explored through Tick’s dissatisfaction with living in the city, which is one of the initial prompts to begin the journey to Alice Springs. In a sign of mateship, Tick’s friends, Adam and Bernadette, join the journey as a chance for mischievous adventure and a highly needed change of scenery respectively, feeling that the outback holds something new and exciting for them. Their attitude is similar to many undertaking an outback adventure, but their performative style of masculinity becomes more exaggerated to show how out of place they are. The vehicles used in each film are used to tame the harsh

¹⁸⁶ See the work of Manning Clark, Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson.

¹⁸⁷ White p. 162.

¹⁸⁸ Clark *A Short History of Australia* p. 296.

¹⁸⁹ Lake pp. 116-121

environment, providing a level of protection from the elements and transport the characters through the desolate terrain. The black muscle car used in *Mad Max*, creates a powerful contrast between the vehicle and the landscape as an intruder with a sinister tone, while the pink bus of *Priscilla* appears as if invading the Australian outback with an air of fun through the high contrast of unnatural colour with the landscape. The bus is a symbol of the drag queens' different approach to life and is not really an unsuitable vehicle as it turns into a home. This contrasts with the violent nature attached to the choice of car in *Mad Max* where the vehicle became a weapon, whereas the bus, affectionately dubbed 'Priscilla', becomes a safe haven from the outback environment and, in a number of ways, its people.¹⁹⁰

The Unfamiliar Journey

The move to settle migrants in the outback rather than cities during the post-war immigration boom suggests the need to tentatively explore the interior of the nation, without having to encounter a challenge to the established population's creature comforts and way of life. The idea of inhabiting the 'unfamiliar north', a concept identified by David Day, was seen by politicians as a way to protect the nation by spreading out the population rather than continuing to let it be concentrated in city areas.¹⁹¹ I make a comparison between inhabitants familiar with the land and those who are visitors and are out of their element. The environment also takes visitors out of their comfort zone, confronting them with an unsympathetic landscape that often tests both their physicality and their sanity.

Venturing into the outback has traditionally been depicted as a male journey, one centred on creating masculinity. Ward discusses a kind of 'natural selection' that the conditions of the outback landscape have on 'human material', where the favoured qualities for "successful assimilation were adaptability, toughness,

¹⁹⁰ Miller *Mad Max*.

¹⁹¹ David Day pp. 300-310.

endurance, activity and loyalty to one's fellows".¹⁹² This embodies the previous theme of 'mateship' and a 'traditional Australian environment', but gives credence to the role the landscape plays in the performance of masculinity. Ward goes on to note that the environment did not have a reforming effect so much as it began to develop and accentuate certain masculine characteristics in travellers.¹⁹³ In a solo journey one discovers their own masculinity rather than having their parameters defined by others. Bernadette's solo trip into the desert in search of help after the bus breaks down provides the opportunity to explore her inner drive and the style of masculinity her performance takes when she is alone. Despite undergoing a sex-change operation, she still maintains some masculine elements to her performance; the rough application of make up and steadily walking over harsh terrain without noticeable trouble, showing how strong and confident she is that she is in control of the situation.

The rough nature of the unfamiliar environment has always been depicted as a masculine place, emphasised by the brutish nature of the few women allowed into cultural texts. Yet, they were always on the fringe rather than openly present in many traditional histories. The lack of women in the case study films exemplifies this, with *Mad Max* only having women in secondary roles, and *Priscilla* having the main female character a man who has undergone a sex-change operation. The lack of a presence of femininity is obvious in the various rural encounters as the women the drag queens meet have been hardened. The drag queens' introduction into an unfamiliar environment presents a new challenge to their performativity, as the townspeople they meet are not sure how to react to their presence. This highlights the unfamiliar nature of women, and femininity, in such a harsh environment and creates a barrier of cultural difference due to the emphasis of masculinity in this particular type of Australian landscape.

Despite inhabiting the continent since 1788, the lack of development inland by the settling immigrant society shows Australians were still unfamiliar with much of their environment, yet still felt it needed to be defended. Day states:

¹⁹² Ward *A nation for a continent* p. 104.

¹⁹³ Ward *A nation for a continent* p. 107.

Despite the Australian defence effort across the northern parts of the continent...Australian defenders would still be as flummoxed as any invader by the unfamiliar climate and terrain.¹⁹⁴

Yet, Day goes on to discuss the nation's continuing effort to develop and populate the 'unfamiliar north' due to Australia's insecurity as a colonising society.¹⁹⁵ After two centuries of settlement, there was still uneasiness about displacing the indigenous peoples. The harsh weather of the outback has also impacted on how tough people need to be in order to live there. The unforgiving nature of the outback has often been discussed as tourists disappear into the desert and are never seen again. However, the more recent development of widespread population through the interior of the continent shows Australians have become more comfortable with their geographic location and more aware of their environment.¹⁹⁶

The inhabitants of outback towns in *Priscilla* reflect Day's idea that many have become comfortable with the environment the outback provides and have adapted to suit it, whereas visitors, such as the drag queens, are confronted by something they had never experienced. While the landscape is the most unknown aspect for many venturing into the outback, the people the drag queens encounter are just as unfamiliar as neither knows how to react to each other. The alien environment tests the characters' comfort zones as they are met with both a harsh physical environment but also a cultural one where they are not always made to feel welcome. This is most explicit in *Priscilla* as the drag queens make their way into the unknown of the outback. The situations they are placed in are totally new to them, and many of their reactions seem automatic, as if on a subconscious level they were more aware of what awaited them in the unknown outback environment than they initially realised. Their performance of masculinity is inherently defensive from their first encounter with a rural environment in Broken Hill, though it has somewhat lessened by the time they reach Alice Springs. By this time, it is apparent that the drag queens do not care about

¹⁹⁴ Day pp. 255-256.

¹⁹⁵ Day p. 279.

¹⁹⁶ Day p. 321.

performing to the same masculine standard they began with and each are more comfortable being true to themselves rather than conforming to the image they initially created. The landscape has hardened them and influenced their performance to take on the traits of the harsh landscape in order for them to survive.

Martyn Lyons and Penny Russell, speaking of the romantic notions of bush and outback living, state “it was a specifically masculine myth, shaped by male values which left little space in the narrative for women”.¹⁹⁷ This is seen in *Mad Max* through the lack of women in speaking roles, the only one really given to ‘Max’s’ wife ‘Jesse’. Despite Jesse’s role in softening the performance her husband makes, her absence highlights the way an environment without women can have an increasingly masculine effect on rural men. The living that Max makes without his wife is one that would not be suitable for women; he lives on the road as he violently hunts down the gang members and does not stop to rest. Ward also discusses the masculine domination of the outback as he notes the ‘scarcity of white women in the outback’ due to the nature of Australia’s geography, which promoted a very masculine population and outlook.¹⁹⁸ This appears to be a marginalising and quite racist point of view as Ward does not consider aboriginal women relevant to mention. The type of outback environment that women are present in *Priscilla* shows them as subservient to men, reinforcing the gender roles with men performing the hard work and women attending to their sexual needs, ‘serving their purpose’ as Lake put it.¹⁹⁹ This is particularly obvious in the character of Cynthia, who serves the sexual needs of the town by entertaining the men at the pub through her exotic show. This is also true of the women in the pubs of *Priscilla*, who are not ladylike, but have adapted to become more masculine, stronger and tougher in the same way that the rural men have.

Historians have more recently been discussing problems with the national myth of the bush, particularly with the majority of the population living in urbanised

¹⁹⁷ Lyons and Russell p. xvi.

¹⁹⁸ Ward *A nation for a continent* p. 30.

¹⁹⁹ Lake p. 120.

areas, citing the myth as ‘specifically masculine’ and shaped by ‘male values’ and have begun addressing this.²⁰⁰ Discussion of these issues has caused the nation as a whole to come to terms with their past as a supplanting society rather than selectively forgetting low points in history and idolising romantic notions.²⁰¹ This is evident in the attitudes of *Priscilla*, where the drag queens face the romanticised myths of the outback head on, challenging them to carve out their own versions of masculinity rather than conforming to the specific rural image that has been immortalised in history. The unfamiliar nature of the environment provides an avenue for exploration of the question of why there has not yet been a successful settlement of the inland regions of the continent. An apprehension of the unknown environment limits the number of people willing to venture out into rural Australia. While the case study films have attempted to discredit the lack of familiarity with the environment, their exploration of the nation’s landscape also highlights the opportunity for discovery and personal journey.

The remote nature of the land was attractive for some, to become isolated and ‘keep out of trouble’ by removing themselves from greater society and the constraints it posed. Ward goes on to note that it was hard for many to return from the amount of freedom their self-imposed isolation gave them.²⁰² This is explored in *Mad Max* through the protagonist’s self-imposed isolation after the death of his loved ones. This is much more of a psychological journey as he does not interact with others apart from when he enacts his revenge. The majority of this journey is spent alone in his car with a passive, cold expression locked on his face, one which does not change despite Max getting revenge on all who had wronged him. Max’s blank expression mimics the landscape he is driving through, barren and bleak, hinting that the filmmakers have used this to symbolise Max’s isolated state of mind.²⁰³ This aligns with Ward’s idea that it is hard to return from the ‘freedom’ the isolation gave. However, in Max’s case

²⁰⁰ Lyons and Russell p. xvi.

²⁰¹ Glenda Sluga “Whose History” in Stuart Macintyre (ed) *The historians conscience: Australian historians on the ethics of history* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2004) pp. 126-137.

²⁰² Ward *A nation for a continent* p. 100.

²⁰³ Ward *A nation for a continent* p. 383.

'freedom' is a stretch, as he has become a prisoner of his own rage. Though Ward's point is reinforced by the impression the film's ending gives, that Max cannot return from this state of mind, the landscape he became a part of has influenced him in such a way to create a performance of his masculinity that was as bleak as he was. The land becomes symbolic of the characters' state of mind and feelings of inadequacy in the face of the vast landscapes encountered in each film.

The difference between the two films is that the journey is made on an individual level in one, and as part of a collective in the other, and this has different effects on the performance of the protagonists' masculinity. *Mad Max's* final journey is made on a very individual level as he enacts his vengeance over those who have wronged him, and the landscape surrounding him speaks a lot about his state of mind. The constant images of a bleak and miserable landscape filled with empty land highlights Max's feelings of hopelessness at not being able to protect his family. This also reinforced the gender role of the male in the family being the protector. In Max's inadequacy to do so, he becomes a shell of a man and his performative style of masculinity reflects this, as he becomes a one-dimensional killing machine and seemingly incapable of performing any other task.

Contrasting to this is the collective journey the drag queens take in *Priscilla*, where they have each other to support and lean on when needed. However, this is also an individual journey for each of the drag queens as they are all looking for something different on their adventure into the outback. Adam is looking for fun and to expose his eccentric personality to anyone he can, yet he inadvertently does a lot of growing as a person and matures along the way. Bernadette looks for an escape from the tiring lifestyle of the city where she felt like she was missing something, and in turn finds happiness in Bob and his chivalrous attitude towards her, as well as discovering the ability to be happy with her situation. She comes to the understanding that the life she left behind was no longer important to her, and once her performative style changed, she could let down her guard and no longer needed to be the tough and forceful personality that had kept her safe in the past. This also reflects the change in landscape in the sense that she found the romantic image of the outback that many have searched for and was

happy to leave her old gender role, as a tough transsexual, behind with her life in the city. Tick makes the biggest individual journey as he struggles with the reality of having a child and needing to be a father. Tick feels he must change his image from a flamboyant performer to one that is more conservative for the sake of his son. Yet, he eventually discovers that his son is happy to have a father and does not judge him for what he does. It is Tick's understanding of conventional gender roles and the way a father should act that causes his confusion, yet the realisation that this is not who he needs to be shows the level maturity in his performative style of masculinity that had previously been missing.

Conclusions

The Australian landscape has played a significant role throughout history as a place for recognising a national character and presenting a masculine cultural identity. Yet, as this chapter suggests, peculiar role the environment can have on the performance of identity proves that the element of the land plays a larger role in the representation of masculinity than one would initially consider. As a shaper of masculinity, the Australian landscape has helped to define that it is not only the most masculine identities that can function in the harsh reality of the outback and other rural environments. While these locations are often thought of in romantic terms, there is opportunity for personal reflection and self-discovery as well as the chance for men to prove one's worth to oneself and the world they inhabit. The reason land has played such a large role in the construction of Australian masculinity is that it has been so widely discussed in relation to a national character. This means it has become hard to separate the two as they have been so ingrained in the national psyche together.

The way each film deals with the influence of location highlights the changing attitude towards the land, from the isolated wasteland of *Mad Max* to a place for personal contemplation of identity, as explored in *Priscilla*. In the space of fifteen years between when *Mad Max* and *Priscilla* were released, attitudes towards the Australian environment changed, just as images of national identity changed and adapted to become more dynamic and individualistic, rather than

conforming to one monolithic identity. Films provide ways of engaging with the performance of masculinity because they provide several channels for analysis and connect ideas on multiple levels. In thinking of these films as representations of the changing attitudes towards masculinity in historiography, the analysis of any film as a potential cultural text becomes possible.

Conclusion

The thesis has used the focus of masculinity to engage with ideas of performativity and how masculinity must be performed to an audience to consider the varied styles of masculinity that one subject can perform. In connecting these ideas to *Mad Max* and *Priscilla*, I have shown concrete examples of the number of styles one character can perform within the assorted social situations in which they are placed. These have drawn on the national icons of the ‘bushman’, the ‘ocker’ and the ‘larrikin’ and depicted how attitudes towards these icons have changed over time. I have also argued that masculinity can be performed on both an individual and a collective level, and that the performance can be tailored to either level depending on the context.

Judith Butler’s concept of performativity has featured strongly in my engagement with various relationships to masculinity throughout this study. It has highlighted the dynamic nature of identity, and given a general framework, for understanding the performance of masculinity. This performance is solidified through constant repetition of different acts to become social norms, and is constrained by the norms that have been ingrained as linked to predefined biology. The limitations placed on an individual by this basis for analysis are cultural, where an individual can draw on the elements of costuming, speech and physical expression, and can be influenced by various settings. These have ranged from an internally constructed environment and external attitudes of different groupings, as well as the relationships between masculinity and each chapter theme: violence, masking and environment.

The overall conclusions this thesis has come to are that the main influence on the performance of masculinity are fear, a need to prove one’s strength and ability to protect a way of life. This has led to a violent streak in the performance of Australian masculinity. *Mad Max* explored this from the position of violence becoming ritual, a daily habit that has become socially normal in the post-

apocalyptic world the film inhabits. Contrastingly, *Priscilla* explored masculinity from the need to assimilate on certain levels; the necessity to fit in created a need for masking of masculine performativity. This film highlights that this was done so the characters would not be met with intolerance or be considered as an outsider. However, *Priscilla* promoted a change in attitude towards assimilation in the sense that, during the personal journey the drag queens took, they incorporate themselves into the environment and adapt to the value systems of the rural setting they are placed within. The comparison of the different treatments of location and environment is shown the relationship between the significance of the Australian landscape on the performance of masculinity. The imagery of the outback was constructed as a place for self-discovery and reflection, and offered the individual the chance to prove their worth, to themselves and to the world they live in. While both films have treated the landscape as an influence on the hardening of Australian masculinity, *Mad Max* did this in a negative way. *Priscilla* was more romantic. This change in attitude towards the land highlighted a rejection of the depressing view of the Australian landscape as the nation began to become more comfortable with its environment.

This thesis has only explored three themes in relation to the performance of masculinity, as a way to engage with *Mad Max* and *Priscilla*, yet there are many avenues available for further exploration. Numerous comparisons between different decades of film production have the potential to explore the changing attitude towards masculine performativity in Australian culture, and, depending on the relationship between each film and masculinity, there are many other analytical possibilities for exploring the themes that can influence an individual or collective identity. Possibilities for future studies can include ideas of class, education and equality and more concrete notions of the physical influence of objects such as cars, buildings and artwork. The performance of masculinity can encompass so many different pathways for examination that the possibilities for exploration and engagement are endless. This is one of the strengths of my analytical framework, that performativity and masculinity can be read from various angles and adapted to any film on most levels.

My approach to film and history presents a different way to engage with and interpret history. Through interpreting Robert Rosenstone and Marnie Hughes-Warrington's approaches to using film as a way for historians to make sense of the past, I propose another avenue for exploring film as historical texts drawing on the previous attitudes towards the treatment of period films as representations of history. I agree with Hughes-Warrington's proposition that previous film and history scholarship has distinguished film as a unique form of history, different to written history, and have taken this idea further to assert that any film can be considered a historical text in its own right. Furthermore, Rosenstone's ideas that historical films reflect the political and social concerns of the period they were produced, though have not been considered as cultural texts, have caused my need for a more inclusive approach. In treating films as cultural texts themselves, rather than simply depicting a moment in history, we are able to see the changing social attitudes of the periods in which they were created.

The strength of my research lies in the application of a select number of general Australian histories, which have been published over four decades. This highlighted the changing attitude of historians and has enabled me to construct a way of engaging with Australian historiographical debates. In using a few texts on a deeper level, rather than engaging with a number of national histories, in a superficial way I have created a more focussed way of engaging with films as historical texts. However, this can also be considered a limitation of my approach as the focus of this research is narrowed by my choice of texts.

There are also strengths in the diversity of the two films I chose. *Mad Max* and *Priscilla* show very different representations of masculinity from a number of perspectives, yet also, to some extent, conform to general understandings of national icons. This has provided both a narrow scope for my enquiry, but also shown the range that performances of masculinity have. The choice of only two films has provided depth of analysis, but has also constrained my investigation to fit with my identified themes. Further exploration into this area would allow for any film to be considered in historiographical debates about films as cultural texts.

The findings of this study have confirmed my hypothesis that masculinity is performed to prove worth and the strength to protect an Australian way of life. I have explored performative masculinity on both individual and collective levels, and have proved masculinity as the foundation of the performativity of Australian identity. The relationship between the way films have represented masculinity from the perspective of violence, masking and environment provided me the opportunity to explore two iconic Australian films that have drawn on, and also challenged, images of national identity. In proving that masculinity, as a performance, is a dynamic construct that is adaptable to any social situation, I have argued that these films have displayed a number of performative styles are achievable by one individual or a collective group. The scope of this research has considered masculine performativity in relation to Australian history and film, and also has provided a new way of engaging with the past, drawing on motion pictures as culturally representative texts. There is still much to explore in this area and I hope to engage more with this creative new way of exploring the performance of Australian masculinity.

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